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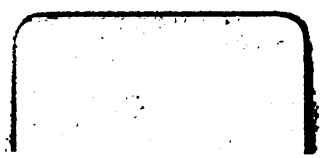

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BY

L. B. WALFORD

AUTHOR OF "THE HAVOC OF A SMILE," "THE BABY'S GRANDMOTHER," ETC., ETC.

NEW YORK

JOHN W. LOVELL COMPANY

150 WORTH STREET, CORNER MISSION PLACE

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THE MISCHIEF OF MONICA

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L. B. WALFORD

AUTHOR OF

"THE HAVOC OF A SMILE," "THE BABY'S GRANDMOTHER," ETC, ETC.

"How brew the brave drink, Life?
Take of the herb hight morning-joy,
Take of the herb hight evening-rest,
Pour in pain lest bliss should cloy,
Shake in sin to give it zest . . .
Then down with the brave drink, Life."

BURTON

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THE MISCHIEF OF MONICA.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

MISCHIEF IS THE VERY SPICE OF LIFE.

How brew the brave drink, Life?
Take of the herb hight morning joy,
Take of the herb hight evening rest,
Pour in pain lest bliss should cloy,
Shake in sin to give it zest . . .
Then down with the brave drink, Life.—BURTON.

"WELL!"

There is no word in the English language which has more intonations than the ejaculation "Well!" It has as many meanings as there are notes of the gamut. There is the "Well" of pure preface, the "Well!" of utter indifference, the "Well!" of good humor, the "Well!" of chagrin, the "Well!" of amazement, and the "Well!" of despair — together with all the hybrid "Wells" formed by the fusion of one or more of the above with others, *ad infinitum*. It is therefore something to say for the "Well" which stands at the head of this chapter, that it was as fully charged with significance and import as though it contained the very marrow and pith of a dozen good round "Wells!" rolled into one. It was the "Well!" of youthful ferocity and self-will armed to the teeth; and yet it had a kind of lurking gleam about it too, which, like a grain of some sweet spice thrown into a pint of bitter mixture, just

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took off the sharpness which otherwise might have set the teeth on edge.

"Well!" said Miss Monica Lavenham, and looked about her.

She was in a handsome—nay, a gorgeous—drawing-room, fitted up in the latest style: heavy with velvet, and rich with color. On every side was luxury; on every hand comfort. Above all, order reigned supreme. So much her eyes took in, and then, not being a young lady with a turn for furniture, she walked to the window and looked out. Her sister was already there, having also given utterance to a counter "Well!"—and the two now regarded each other with curiously long faces and rueful eyes.

"It is a regular take in, Bell."

"Humph!"

"A hall, indeed!"

"Yes, indeed."

"A mere villa!"

"Take care, someone may hear you."

"No one can hear. The rooms are a tolerable size, and that is something. But I never was so thoroughly—why, there is not even an avenue! We are actually on the road!" in accents of deep disgust. "The road is there," pointing with her finger—"there, where that carriage is driving along! The dust comes over the hedge. And this little particle of shrubbery, where we pop in at one gate and out at the other, is all that separates us from the high road!"

Isabel listened gloomily.

"The whole place is a fraud," proceeded her sister, who was evidently the speaker of both. "When I saw we were turning in at that little lodge down there, my very heart died within me. What in all the world, Bell, are we to do? We can't go on with it. We can't live in a villa. We can't look out upon a road We can't——"

The door opened, and a respectable-looking elderly man-servant appeared, who, with something of the air of being engaged in an unusual occupation, set out a small table, covered it with a cloth, and deposited thereon a handsome silver tea service, with cakes, bread

and butter, plates and knives; everything, in short, provocative of a tempting little meal. The hour—for it was just five o'clock—made the refreshment welcome and natural. Yet no sooner had the door finally closed than the sisters, who had been watching the arrangements with an air of mingled curiosity and amusement, again looked at each other, and simultaneously repeated the same words "Well!" into which one of them had before contrived to infuse such an infinity of meaning. After which they drew their chairs up to the table.

"'Tis an odd set out; but I don't suppose he had ever done such a thing in his life till now," said Monica, with more alacrity than she had hitherto evinced. "And certainly the poor old thing was in the right. I am dying of thirst. Oh, this tea is good!—men's tea is always good. That is why I like my tea at a club. Clubs! Ah me—ah me! It will be months, perhaps years, before we set foot in a club again, I daresay. But do look, Bell, what fine old china? Would not Aunt Fanny have admired this china? She would find little else to admire in our new home, I am afraid,"—with a sigh.

"Are we to consider we have come to live here?" said Isabel, with a slow, solemn emphasis that made it appear as though the idea had been presented to her mind for the first time. "For the present of course we have,—there was nothing else for us to do. Uncle Schofield would never have adopted us, and promised to leave us his money——"

—"'Sh! take care!"

"Unless we had come," continued Isabel, lowering her tone; though indeed it was only a certain caution born of the life the sisters had hitherto led which had induced the hasty warning, since the dulcet tones of both, tones peculiarly soft and well modulated, could by no possibility have been overheard by any one outside the apartment. "If we had refused," proceeded she, but Monica interposed.

"I do not believe we could have refused," said Monica.

"Oh, we *could*, I suppose."

"I fancy not: not until we are twenty-one, at least. We are not twenty—I am not twenty yet, and you are

not nineteen. I am sure I understood that we had no choice."

"All I meant to say was that, even if we *had* had a choice, we could not throw away our chances."

"Of course not."

"So here we have got to be."

"It is a fraud, all the same," said Monica, cutting herself a slice of cake with somewhat more complacency. "The old gentleman has good tea and good cake—I will say so much for him; but he has *done* us, and done us shamefully about everything else. I don't say he ever actually drew up a map of his estate, or described the family mansion; but he wrote upon paper with 'Flodden Hall' at the top of the page; he said there was plenty of room for us to run about in—to 'run about in,' Bell, with checked aprons and bibs, I presume—and he could assure us of 'plenty of amusement in a hospitable neighborhood.' Good heavens, Bell! if this is the 'hall' what will the neighborhood be!"

Monica and Isabel Lavenham, two young beauties of high fashion and much experience of the world, although, as we have seen, yet in the early days of womanhood, had indeed some cause for astonishment, and apprehension in their present surroundings, according to their views of life. Their mother had been a plain merchant's daughter; but she had not only been a very pretty woman, she had possessed a large fortune, and the two inducements combined had brought forward Colonel the Hon. Charles Lavenham as a candidate for her hand.

The marriage had given the satisfaction on both sides which such a match is sure to do.

Colonel Lavenham was as handsome as his wife, and after a more distinguished, patrician fashion; in consequence, no one was surprised that the two little girls who had been born during the two years succeeding the marriage proved to be examples of childish loveliness. Soon after the birth of the second the mother had died; and although predictions had not been wanting of a speedy re-marriage on the part of the widower, these had never been fulfilled.

Instead, Colonel Lavenham had taken to the race-

course and the gaming-table; had dissipated the principal portion of his wife's money; and had finally departed this life, leaving debts and troubles behind him.

His daughters, then on the verge of womanhood, had been consigned thereafter to the care of his childless brother, another soldier of the name, whose lively and easy-tempered, if somewhat feather-brained spouse, was the very woman to be transported by the idea of producing in society two nieces so sure of success as the youthful Monica and Isabel.

The arrangement had suited everybody; and two successive London seasons had been gone through with *éclat*, when fate, which will sometimes interfere with our "best-laid schemes," suddenly pulled the check-string, and brought everything to a standstill.

Mrs. Lavenham became ill, and was ordered abroad to try the effects of foreign waters; whilst her husband, as if he had only waited for such a prescription to be written, forthwith developed a complaint requiring treatment very nearly similar, threw up his commission, and proclaimed himself "an old fogey." The two agreed to give up their London house, disperse their establishment, and trot about the Continent together, attended merely by a valet and a waiting-maid.

All had been arranged, and the spirits of both had revived under the prospect of change, and an easy life with no demands upon it, when suddenly Mrs. Lavenham had exclaimed: "But what about the girls? We cannot possibly take Monica and Isabel with us."

"Certainly not," her husband had replied promptly. "They are expensive young women, and we shall not now have more than just enough to keep ourselves comfortably. We have spent a lot of late, living in the manner we have done, and it has been principally for their sakes. I am sure the balls, and parties—both of them ought to have been off our hands long before this time. And I don't know where their money goes to, if it is not spent, every penny of it, on their backs. They have each a hundred and fifty pounds a year: a hundred and fifty pounds a year and only themselves to spend it upon; they ought to have been able to do

more than just clothe themselves out of a sum like that. They——"

"Oh, well, my dear!" Mrs. Lavenham was easy-going, as we have said. "Oh, well, a hundred and fifty a year is no great amount; and they are lovely girls, and have to be properly dressed" (conscious of having more than once quieted a dressmaker by small sums out of her own pocket, both Monica's and Isabel's having run dry). "All the world allows that your nieces are——"

"Never mind—never mind. They must learn not to look upon themselves as my nieces now," somewhat shortly; "they must be someone else's nieces in future."

"My dear, what do you mean?"

"Why, what I mean is clear enough, if you will take the pains to see it. Who is that uncle they have got, down there in Lancashire, that brother of their mother's —Schofield is his name, eh? I have been making inquiries about him, and I find he is as rich as Crœsus, unmarried, and quite friendlily disposed. It is a perfect Providence for the girls that there is such a person. As you say, they are nice girls enough; pretty, and——"

"Pretty! Why they are far more than——"

"Than anything *he* is ever likely to have met with, at any rate. They ought to do well down there. A Liverpool or Manchester magnate is not to be sneezed at in these days. By Jove! I think we have been fools to have neglected such an opportunity before. Directly I made up my mind to retire, and go in for health and that sort of thing along with you, I saw at once it would never do to take girls like Monica and Isabel to Monte Carlo, and——"

"Are we going to Monte Carlo?"

"We shall winter there. It will be the very place for the winter months. But we should get into a sea of troubles if we had two such appendages as these two hanging on to us. They would be flirting all over the place, with every scoundrelly and beggarly 'Count' they might pick up. Foreign health resorts are the very deuce for girls like Monica and Bell," he had concluded, decisively.

To this his wife, who had been really ailing, and who

was now as much taken up with her own invalid habits and prospects as she had formerly been with her rounds of pleasure, had acquiesced almost with a sigh of relief.

She was fond of her young beauties in her way. She had been proud of them; had been indebted to them; had perceived that they had been of use to her in society; had brought the best men to her house, and made her what she never otherwise would have been—one of the smartest, most sought-after hostesses in London. But she instinctively felt that all this was now at an end; nay, that with her retirement from the social stage, and adoption of an altered routine, Monica and Isabel would no longer suit their requirements to hers. They were still in their heyday, still demanding their full measure of fun and frolic, still requiring her to bear her part in their triumphal progress, and still, it must be owned, intolerant of any hindrance or obstacle which impeded it.

She could not say that they had been unkind—nay, Monica had been positively sympathetic and pitiful when informed that her aunt was suffering, but she had read disappointment and vexation on her brow, as on Bell's every time a new prohibition had had to be made, or a new hour kept; and though nothing would be said, here had been for some time past a growing anxiety, quite unconnected with any other anxiety, in the breast of the faded, sickly woman, who yet clung to the remembrance of past triumphs and successes, namely, the apprehension of what would be the final attitude of her gay young nieces towards her final self. If she were about to turn into a peevish tyrant of the sick-room, what would the girls think?

Mrs. Lavenham could not endure that the girls should think her a bore, a marplot, or a nuisance. Other chaperons were, she knew, often enough regarded in some such light; but it had been her pride to believe that she was on better terms with her two superb nieces, of whose opinions she stood in no small awe, and whose approbation of her appearance, or of her toilette, was a thing to be obtained. If they should begin now to think her humdrum, or tiresome! And she really did want to be humdrum, that was the truth. She

felt fit for nothing else, could not rouse herself to be anything else.

It had ended in Mr. Schofield being written to.

Mr. Schofield had responded with an alacrity that had almost surprised himself, and that would have been deeply resented by some other branches of his family had they known of it; as, however, it had been the outcome of several rather important admixtures, we had better inform our readers of these, and then leave them to judge for themselves whether or not such resentment would have been a natural and creditable one.

The new uncle, who according to Colonel Lavenham's theory had been created in the very nick of time to meet an awkward necessity, was more of a man of means than a man of culture. Yet he was not a vulgar man. He had no vulgar propensities, nor tastes. He was neither ostentatious nor purse-proud, and his daily life was on the whole a praiseworthy one.

But there are many gradations between a mind superior, refined, elevated; and one of ordinary capacity, satisfied with poor pasturage, and confined within a narrow range. Mr. Schofield read his newspaper, and fancied he cared about many things which really no more interested him, no more moved him nor touched him, than if they had been written in an unknown language. He read his paper because other men read theirs. As he went into business every morning he took his "Daily Post" with him into the railway carriage as a matter of course; then he opened it, scanned it, and folded it hither and thither, making a remark to his opposite neighbor during the process, as a part of his day's work; but we may safely affirm that from the moment in which it was laid aside (he generally left it behind in the carriage,) till the following morning when its successor was taken up, no single thought of anything contained therein, with the exception of the market reports, ever crossed our merchant's brain.

Thus it will be seen that he was not what might be called an intellectual man.

On the other hand, Mr. Schofield had his opinions, and they were opinions which did him credit. His views of his duty towards God and his neighbor were clear and defined, and, we may add, were carried out in a manner that might have shamed many a more pretentious Christian. He worshipped devoutly and gave liberally, and he lived a quiet, blameless life.

Now we come to his receiving Colonel Lavenham's letter.

That letter came to Mr. Joseph Schofield, as the recollection of himself came to its writer, at a most opportune moment. He had just finished building and decorating the handsome and luxurious residence which Monica's cruel tongue now termed "a mere villa." He had planted the grounds and gardens, stocked the vineries, laid on the hot-water apparatus; he had arranged the stables, seen to it that every horse had a loose box; purchased a few new vehicles, enlarged and re-adjusted the whole establishment, within and without, and was caught, as it were, in the very act of wondering what there could possibly remain which he had left undone?

It was dull to be doing nothing. He had been living in a round of small excitements which had given a zest to every day of the week; every evening, when he had come back from his work, there had been something to be seen to and decided upon; and on Sundays, when no workmen were about, and no orders were being awaited, he had found a quiet and intense satisfaction in strolling from place to place, and examining in each particular department all that had been effected since he had last thus strolled.

But at length a point had been reached where it had seemed there remained absolutely nothing which could be improved, or altered; and he had had one long, lonely evening in which to digest the unpalatable truth. He had felt as if he never could be so busily employed, nor so well amused again.

The next morning's post had brought Colonel Lavenham's letter; a letter which had been penned with considerable skill and adroitness; a diplomatic, wily epistle,

wherein the beauty, talent, and amiable qualities of "our and your charming nieces" had been no less dwelt upon, than had the forlorn condition and dependent circumstances of the orphans.

Colonel Lavenham had lamented in feeling terms his utter inability to do for the girls what he would "so gladly, so readily have done;" he had bemoaned the hard necessity which had compelled his dear invalid wife and himself to recognize that a parting was inevitable;— but he had also contrived to insinuate in pretty round terms—although not offensive ones—that his brother's children were equally related to Mr. Schofield as to himself, and that he had, if anything, rather stepped out of his way than otherwise to make a home for their "mutual nieces" hitherto.

"Mutual nieces" might not be grammar, but it went straight to the "mutual uncle's" heart. Mr. Schofield fancied that he had received a manly, straightforward letter—one in which there had been no patronizing tone of superiority—one in which a nobleman's son, a colonel in the Life Guards, a swell in every way, had treated him as an equal and as a relation, and he was pleased accordingly.

He was very much pleased. It seemed to him all very fair and right.

It was perfectly true that Charles Lavenham's brother had so far been a father to Charles and Mary's children; and that being a married man, though not a family man, he had undoubtedly been the proper guardian and foster-parent hitherto.

That he had himself never been asked to take any charge of the orphans—nay, that he had never so much as once set eyes upon them, was nothing. He had not wanted to see them; he had not thought about them. He had supposed they were all right; indeed he had known that they were being properly cared for; but as he had never once met his sister during the few years which had intervened between her marriage and her death, he had in his quiet way taken it for granted that she had, as it were, become a naturalized Lavenham, and no more a Schofield.

Without resenting this, its effect had been to free

our elderly bachelor from any further interest or responsibility as regarded his unknown relatives. He had his own friends, his own surroundings, his own regular and congenial mode of life; and if any thought of his aristocratic connections, denizens of another sphere, ever crossed his mind, it was to be well content that they should be in existence, but to be equally resigned to their entire abstention from any personal intercourse with himself.

Now, however, he experienced a new and sudden revulsion of feeling.

Heyday! What was about to happen now? What would people say of him now? Here was he going to have two fine nieces, two young women of fashion, come down to keep house for him, and do the honors of his new mansion! It would be said that he had known beforehand for whom he was preparing drawing-rooms and dressing-rooms, and that he had meant all along that Mr. Schofield's relations should cut a dash second to none in the neighborhood. Curiously enough, almost his first recognized thought was a swift recollection upon a matter which had hitherto hung in the balance; he now decided, in the twinkling of an eye, to have a nice open barouche, instead of the usual wagonette then in vogue for country use.

Just so: a barouche, of course, would be the only carriage suitable for the young ladies his nieces, when they should desire to make calls and drive about the surrounding neighborhood.

Before the letter had been answered, before he had finished the last sip of his coffee, he had in his mind's eye seen himself handing up with his own hands the beautiful Miss Lavenhams to their seats in an exquisitely appointed, well-swung equipage; giving the order to the coachman, and waving farewells to them as they rolled off down the drive. He had seen them returning full of news and gayety; beheld the two elegant figures, choicely arrayed (he liked to see well-dressed women), trip downstairs subsequently to receive his guests; later on adorn his well-covered table; flavor every course with their bright, amusing vivacity; take the lead in conversation, a little overawe the homelier folk

around—why not? why not?—and, in short, be the credit of the family and the sunshine of the home.

In return for which nothing old Joe Schofield could do should be wanting.

No wonder Colonel Lavenham found his so-called "brother-in-law's" letter all that was handsome and satisfactory; voted the old boy a trump; and signed himself "brother-in-law" in return, when inditing a joyful acceptance on the part of the girls.

"It is a piece of luck you may never have again," he informed them, when concluding a peroration on rich merchants, bachelor hosts, and kind relations. "Whatever you do, you, Monica, and you, Bell—whatever you do," with a solemnity and impressiveness such as he had seldom, if ever, before manifested, "*don't throw it away.*"

The two who listened had been accustomed to look up to the speaker. He was wise in the only wisdom they knew anything about. They perceived him to be successful in the only world for which they had any regard. It was natural that they should now accept his dictum, see with his eyes, and do as they were bid.

And then it was the month of July, and, though the season was not over, it was drawing towards a close. Colonel Lavenham assured the two that they would do well to quit the scene, without lingering to the last, even though they might be invited to do so by one or another, after the house in Lowndes Square should be given up. He had protested that they were going to a lovely country home—he knew Lancashire well, had shot there, by Jove! when a young man; remarkably fine country it was, and they would have every luxury, and a capital old boy of an uncle to do what they pleased with. It would be odds but they got old Joseph to take a house in Belgravia next season, if they played their cards well; and who could say but he himself and their Aunt Fanny mightn't be in town, too, some time in May or June, if their aunt were well enough to run over for a month or so, and if neither of them was married before that time—ha! ha! ha!—and so he had rattled on, until

insensibly all the party were more cheerful than they had been for some time previously.

The parting had been got over with equal ease: with hilarious prognostications on the one part, and arch rejoinders on the other; and, finally, Monica and Isabel had found themselves off on their northern journey, surcharged with all the curiosity and joyous anticipation which their well satisfied relative could contrive to insert into their bosoms—emotions which, alas! only lasted until they had turned in at the carriage gates of Flodden Hall, and which fell to the ground with a clash when Monica, standing up in the midst of Mr. Schofield's splendid reception room, gave utterance to that one terribly significant *'Well!'* wherewith our story opens.

CHAPTER II.

TWO EVES IN ONE PARADISE.

Without the smile from partial beauty won,
Oh, what were man? A world without a sun.
—CAMPBELL.

BEING a man of method, Mr. Schofield did not return from business any earlier than usual on the all-important day which was to see his bachelor household invaded by two prospective female sovereigns; but he walked up from the station with a quick step, and shut the entrance gate behind him with a sharper click, because of something very like a flutter in his breast; and he looked quickly round, with an eye that took in everything, and was aware whether every direction had been carried out on the instant, as he approached the house.

Nothing was out of gear. The drive had been swept till the smallest twig had disappeared; the velvet lawn had been freshly mown, and every edge of every

flower-bed neatly clipped; the flower-beds themselves were a blaze of bloom, and around and within the entrance porch brilliant exotics made the whole warm air heavy with fragrance.

"It's a Paradise," murmured Joseph Schofield to himself, as he drew a sigh of satisfaction. "A perfect Paradise! They can have seen nothing of the kind to beat this, I take it. . . And they fresh from London houses and streets, too! Poor girls! I wonder—ahem!" and he stopped short, and looked wistfully at the door-bell.

It was a heavy, wrought-iron, hanging bell, massive and handsome, in keeping with all the rest; and its owner knew that it would raise a loud, solemn note of warning which none could mistake, were he to pull the handle. Should he do so, and desire to be conducted into the ladies' presence? On the other hand, he did not feel quite, absolutely sure that the ladies had arrived. The very lightest of light wheel-marks had undoubtedly been left upon the drive, but those would have been there in any case, as the carriage which had been sent to meet the travellers would have had to pass the front door, empty or full, on its return to the stables. Had they come, he wondered?

Then he turned, and took a peep into the large, square, turkey-carpeted hall within, and there he saw what settled the question. He saw a pretty little lady's reticule, which had been dropped on one of the tables and forgotten. All other signs of luggage, wraps, travelling bags, and the usual paraphernalia had disappeared. But the little Russia-leather reticule was enough.

As our merchant's glance fell upon it, the color mantled faintly to his cheek. He had not known before that he was a shy man; he was not supposed to be a shy man; he could go out to dinner, and offer his arm to madam or miss without any feeling of embarrassment; and he could entertain again with equal complacency; but—but—well, he supposed he was just a little nervous on this occasion. Meeting ordinary ladies in an ordinary way, where there was no need to trouble oneself as to what to say to them, and no

reason for minding whether one pleased them or not, was not altogether the same thing as having to welcome to your roof two unknown female relatives, reputed beauties, and women of fashion.

Of course he should not think of saluting his nieces—he blushed up to the very ears at the idea of such a thing—but should he, or should he not, make them a little speech of hospitality? Also, what about calling them by their names? And if they should begin to thank him—oh, how he hoped they would not begin to thank him—but what then, must he respond? To say, "My dears, all mine is yours," might possibly convey an intention which, whatever time might bring forth, was not as yet matured. To say——. The door at the far end of the hall opened, and the tall figure of Monica Lavenham appeared on the threshold.

Tired of sitting still in the, to her, dull, uninteresting apartment, she had just announced to her sister her intention of exploring the outer domain, and, as she termed it, "learning the worst," when the projected campaign was suddenly nipped in the bud by the apparition of her new uncle, halting, irresolute, within his own doorway.

For him it was a moment of relief. We have said that he was not a vulgar man; his air was perfectly free from self-importance and his manner from ostentation. Obliged now to step forward and greet his visitors, he underwent the ordeal with a simplicity and frankness which produced an immediate impression. "Uncle Lavenham was right about our relation himself," reflected Monica, who, it may be remarked, usually thought for both. "The rest maybe, and *is* a fraud—a vile, premeditated fraud—but Uncle Schofield is the right sort of Uncle Schofield. I should not wonder if something might be made of him, after all!"

"And he certainly will leave us all his money," cogitated Bell, on whom this part of Colonel Lavenham's oracular wisdom had made a profound impression.

"We were just beginning to wonder when we were

to see you, Uncle Schofield," began the more talkative niece in sprightly accents; "we have been here an hour, and everyone has been so kind to us. We have had tea; and we were thinking of taking a stroll in the lovely garden. May we go into the garden?"

She could not have suggested anything he would have liked better. What a charming girl! What a pleasant winning manner! What a sweet voice! Her sister too, standing smiling by (they had early been taught to smile, poor things!) he scarcely knew which he liked the looks of the most.

As for their beauty, truth compels us to state that at the first blush Mr. Schofield did not think quite so much of his nieces' beauty as he had expected to do. In his quiet way he was somewhat of an authority; and having read novels (yes, reader, novels; start not, for there is no greater novel-reader than your sober British merchant) Mr. Joseph Schofield, having as we say, regularly read his novel every evening after dinner, for the past thirty years or so, had been prepared for something very magnificent indeed.

He had had a notion that he should have his breath taken away by a vision,—the first sight of a novelist's heroine is always a "vision"—a dazzling mist of golden locks, sunny eyes, damask cheeks, and the like. Instead of which the youthful travellers, who were somewhat fatigued after a hot, dusty journey, considerably disturbed in mind, put out, let down, and flat altogether, looked merely a couple of elegant young women, oval or rather pear-shaped faces, correct features, and small heads finely poised upon their shoulders.

Monica had taken off her hat, and he could see that she had waves of ruddy-brown hair, and when he came to think of it afterwards, he could call to mind a pair of dark eyes under straight barred eyebrows, but on the first meeting there had been a momentary disappointment.

With their soft, confiding address, however, and with their first request and proposition, he had no fault to find,

"If you are not too tired," he responded delightedly; "I am sure I—but just wait till I get the keys, for it is nearly six o'clock, and the houses may be locked for the night."

"Pray take no trouble for us," but before the sisters could proceed further, their host had vanished.

The smile on their faces changed its character. "What an oddity!" murmuredBell.

"Not a bad oddity," murmured her sister back.

"I wish we could have gone alone."

"I don't; I think he is likely to prove as good ground for exploration as his 'houses.' I shall shirk those houses; at least, unless the grapes are ripe, but I am afraid it is rather early for grapes."

Mr. Schofield was seen approaching. "Is it not rather early for grapes, Uncle Schofietd?" inquired Monica, cheerfully. She was an adept at thus dovetailing her asides into open conversation.

"The houses are only a year old," replied he, "so we must not expect too much. But I believe they are doing well."

"I thought they looked new," proceeded the same speaker, taking as it were, naturally, the principal part in the conversation, "the house and stables, and everything is new, is it not?" How she did it let others say, but even in the simple query there was an inflection of interest and appreciation which was not lost upon her auditor.

"Everything, everything," rejoined he, promptly. "A friend had built a house I fancied, so I sent to him for the name of his architect. Then I just handed it all over to the same fellow—for I know nothing about such matters—and it was done as you see it. The stables, you see, are in the same style; and the lodges, and that little cottage down there; there is a nice old body living down there, who remembers your mother; perhaps you will go and see her sometimes—she would take it kind of you; and here, you see, is the paddock for the horses: and beyond it, is the meadow for the cows. Those are the piggeries down there—we raise prize pigs; it is a kind of hobby of mine. And that high wire fencing is for

the poultry yard—we have a few prize hens, too—it is not much of a farm, not much, only a bit, but it is amusing in its way; the out-doors servants and dairymaids have their quarters here; and that is the head-gardener's little girl in the red frock, down by the brook."

Had the two whom Mr. Schofield was conducting round his premises been ordinary visitors, none of the above would have been forthcoming. To him his horses, cows, pigs, and poultry were an occupation and a pleasure; but he had none of the egotistical delight in details respecting them, which might have been inferred from so long a speech. He simply told his nieces all that there was to tell, because they were his nieces; because his home was to be their home; because it was his part to instruct and theirs to learn.

Nor were his listeners sufficiently wanting in acuteness to be misled:

("He is all right, as I said he was," nodded Monica to herself. "Quite a dear; so earnest about his piggeries and his henneries; and the place is a little, a very little, better than I thought it was. I had no idea it opened out at the back, as it does. There is certainly more land than at first appeared; and those are fine woods overhanging the meadow; and, thank goodness! there *is* a meadow. It will be some sort of outlet; some means of escape. I spy a shady lane, too; and the brook is really very pretty, winding about down in the hollow below. We must have some seats made.") "Uncle Schofield," aloud, "what a charming bank this is! You have some seats up and down, I daresay. Do you often bring out your book and read here, under the trees?"

"Not much time for reading in the daytime, my—my dear," replied her uncle. "I seldom get home before six o'clock, sometimes later; except on Saturday afternoons, and then I generally take a ride."

"Oh, you ride? Are you fond of horses? Have you riding horses?" but here the young lady checked herself; she was conscious of an eagerness that betrayed what was passing within her bosom, and

was not quite certain whether or not such betrayal were wise. Her other uncle, hers and Bell's mentor hitherto, had never failed to warn their youthful indiscretions against hasty exposure of the real feeling of the moment.

But it appeared that the new uncle saw nothing amiss.

"You and your sister shall have horses of your own," he said simply, "you shall choose them for yourselves; and if you will allow me to escort you on horseback upon Saturdays, it will be a pleasant change from the lonely afternoon rides I have had till now!"

"How kind you are!" Even the quieter Bell burst forth into sudden animation, for the pair were noted horsewomen, and their horses had not always hitherto been such as did them justice.

Colonel Lavenham had chosen to let his charges be seen in the Row, and to take them thither himself on most days, but he had mounted them shabbily, grudging the price of good hacks, and aware that, although fine horsemanship could not be displayed on sorry beasts, fine figures and graceful carriage could be as well exhibited on the back of a screw as on that of a thoroughbred. He had expected Isabel and Monica to amble slowly up and down—even occasionally to keep to a walk during the whole time they were out; while at times he would stand and stand by the railings, talking to one friend after another, making an excuse for keeping stationary, till he often had Bell at peevishness and Monica at indignation point.

It was only when the sisters had been visiting at other houses, houses where there were good studs and accommodating hosts, that they had known the real joys of horsemanship, and that their own skill had been rated as it had deserved. Colonel Lavenham, discoursing upon the advantages of Flodden Hall as a residence, would infallibly have included its stables and their occupants in his *résumé* had he entertained the idea for a moment that Mr. Schofield would keep riding horses. About carriages he had

had little doubt: but a vague, though of course erroneous impression that mercantile men were never either hunting men nor riding men had kept him quiet on the other head; since he had judged, and rightly, that if his nieces had been once fired with an idea which was destined to be baulked at the outset, it would set them against all the rest. N. B.—The reader will here please to take note that we are writing of twenty years ago, when much less was known in the fashionable world of the mercantile world than is now the case. Colonel Lavenham's ignorance may therefore be pardoned.

He knew what it meant when Monica was "set against" anything, and he wished the Schofield scheme to have a fair start.

The present surprise was therefore all the more agreeable. Bell, who had hung languidly back hitherto, now pressed forward; while the half-ironical attention of her sister was exchanged for genuine and very lively interest. In a trice both showed that they knew what they were talking about. Mr. Schofield, who was not learned in stable lore, but who liked to have everything about him good of its kind, was secretly astonished, and a little taken aback, at finding himself interrogated briskly on points as to which he knew very nearly nothing, and being in turn made the recipient of information he had so far only received from his coachman or his grooms.

One thing was clear however: his fair guests were mightily pleased; there was no mistaking the increased flow of language and alertness of movement which testfied to his having made a point with them; and a visit to the stables, and inspection of the occupants already in possession, obviously deepened the good impression made.

"I noticed what a beautiful pair brought us up from the station, Uncle Schofield," observed Monica joyously. They did not seem as if had over much work to do either, for they flew along, and in at the gate, before Bell and I had time to rub our eyes, and wonder where we were! Did the same horses go again for you?"

"I walked up. If I drive, I generally have the dog-

cart. But I walk most days," continued Mr. Schofield, feeling every minute more and more at his ease. "The carriage will be for you, and your sister. As soon as I knew you were coming, I ordered the one in which you drove up. If there is anything wrong about it you must let me know; but I went to our best coach-builder," naming a well-known firm, "and he assured me that this was a ladies' carriage."

"It is the most perfect carriage. Why, Uncle Schofield, how wonderfully kind you are to us!" And Monica Lavenham experienced again a little twinge at her heart as she spoke. She had, it is true, observed to her sister as the two bowled along that, taken all together, horses and equipage formed a fair turnout; but all satisfaction on that head had been swallowed up in the wrath which had followed, consequent on the discovery that the fair turn-out belonged to a "mere villa." She was now a very little ashamed of herself.

Isabel, however, for once came to the rescue. The prospect of having a riding horse of her own, a really pretty, smart horse, one which should carry suitably her really pretty, smart person, had sent an unwonted glow of exhilaration through Bell's veins. She now took up the thread of conversation.

"Have you any grass lanes about, Uncle Schofield?"

"Second to none in that respect, my dear. The grass paths of Lancashire and Cheshire are not to be equalled all over England. The whole of either county is intersected by them, and you could ride for weeks and weeks and never need to take the same route; nor to come back the way you set out."

"Delightful. Do you hunt?"

"I do not. I am not a good enough horseman; besides which I have not the time," said Mr. Schofield in his quiet, truthful voice. Then he paused, and continued in somewhat hesitating accents, "Unless you and your sister particularly wish to ride to hounds, I should prefer—but of course you are your own mistresses——"

"But we should never think of doing anything to vex you," said Monica promptly. "And——"

"And we can't hunt, and don't like it," added Bell.

"Even if we could," rejoined her sister with an internal frown, "we should give it up, if our uncle wished it, Bell; and as it is, I think the sound of those grass paths and shady lanes is all that either of us could desire."

"How soon are you likely to hear of horses for us?" was Isabel's next, breathed in the soft, cooing tones which covered many an impertinence. "The weather is so very fine just now."

"Oh, I can see about them directly, my dear!" replied her uncle, to whom it occurred no more than to the speaker that it would have been in better taste to have let such a question alone. "I shall be only too glad to see about them to-morrow. How shall we arrange it? Will you have one or two out here for yourselves to inspect? Or will you come in to town with me?"

"Town?" murmured Isabel, with open eyes. For her there was but one "Town."

"I go in rather early," proceeded Mr. Schofield, mistaking her surprise; "but if you should prefer waiting for a later train, Rushton—that's my man—could put you in, and I would meet you at the other end. It is only a matter of three-quarters of an hour; it might be less, but only slow trains stop at this station; but, perhaps, as you are just off a long journey, you would rather rest yourselves for a few days, and go up at the end of the week?"

This, however, was not to be thought of. They made light of the journey, the fatigue, and the need for repose, in a single breath; were so obviously eager and sparkling about the proposed expedition, and so ready to agree to everything—except postponement or abandonment—that the plan was shaped and fixed before Mr. Schofield recollected that a strong and important argument on the other hand had escaped his memory when he proposed it.

"Dear me, I had forgotten that," he murmured half aloud.

"Anything particular?" inquired Monica Lavenham, gayly. "Bell and I will hardly forgive you now, Uncle Schofield, if you have got any tiresome, troublesome

business, which is to keep us from carrying out this delightful expedition."

"Oh, it is none of *my* business, my dear."

"Ha! ha! ha! You should have said 'none of *your* business, my dear," laughed the lady merrily; "but seriously, is there anything——?" and she paused.

"It is my cousin, Mrs. George Schofield," he said; and all three suddenly looked at each other.

"Oh, Mrs. George Schofield," said Monica, prudently omitting any sort of expression from her tone. "I have heard of her, and of our other cousins—there are cousins, are there not? But I did not know they lived in this neighborhood. Where do they live exactly?"

This was perhaps as near the truth as could be expected from a pupil of Colonel Lavenham's who had been warned many times over on the subject of the "Widow Schofield and her brood," and who was in reality much better informed on the subject, owing to his investigations, than she now chose to appear.

"Not very far off. Some four or five miles, so they are hardly *in* the neighborhood," replied her uncle. "In a thickly populated county like this, a mile makes all the difference in the world. I daresay there are twenty or thirty houses nearer than Mrs. George Schofield's."

"Good gracious!" It was Isabel from whom the exclamation proceeded. Monica's lips parted, but she uttered no sound.

"Yes, indeed," continued Mr. Schofield, more cheerfully, "you will not want for society. See here, follow my finger, there are one, two, three, four, five—we can see the roofs of five houses from this little rising; and that is nothing, absolutely nothing, to the numbers that are hidden away. Fine places, too. Mr. David McWhinnock has just built himself a perfect palace; and Mr. Robert Mackinlay another, very little behind it. Scotchmen both of them; the half of us are Scotchmen in this neighborhood. And there's a very pretty spot close to my own lodge gates—you would see it as you turned in, for the gates face ours—that belongs to a nice young couple who have only been married a twelvemonth; and beyond them there is a fine, red sandstone building—the same sandstone as this—that is the prop-

erty of an old maiden lady, whom I have known ever since I was a boy; oh, and there are dozens of others; but you will get to know them all in time—all in time."

"But about Mrs. George Schofield, uncle?" It was Monica this time.

"Yes, my dear, yes; what did you want to know about Mrs. George Schofield?"

"I want to know what she is like, and why you appeared to recollect her with something of a start just now," said Monica boldly. "That is, of course, if you do not mind telling us," she added, good breeding tripping up the heels of curiosity.

"Not at all—not at all," replied Mr. Schofield. "Oh, no, it was only that, having said she would call upon you and your sister to-morrow, she might consider that you ought to stop at home for her."

"Of course, my dear uncle, if *you* wish us to do so——" Monica paused.

"You do not think it necessary, eh?"

"If you ask me, no; not in the very least; not in the very slightest," replied Miss Lavenham, color and emphasis alike rising. "Oh, dear me, no! It is never done. Mrs. George Schofield would never expect it. She should not have said she was coming; it was a mistake on her part. Nobody ought to say they are coming, unless they are asked to come; nobody ever does say it; Uncle Schofield?—" Another pause, decidedly suggestive.

Uncle Schofield's eyes were twinkling.

"Well, my dear?"

"Just fancy what a dreadful thing it would be if one had to stay in the house every time that an acquaintance chose to say it was her intention to call! Would it not be perfect tyranny?"

"My dear," replied her uncle, prudently waiving the question, "you know about such matters better than I do, or," his eyes twinkled again, "better than Mrs. George Schofield does, I suspect. You will do what is proper, I am sure. Mrs. George Schofield is a relation——"

"A cousin, is she not?"

"Her husband was your mother's first cousin."

"We don't think much of that nowadays," said Monica lightly. "We have no nearer relations, have we?"

"None—except myself."

"I am glad of that," observed a soft voice on his other side. "We don't particularly care about being too much related, Uncle Schofield."

A quick glance from Monica. Internally she was wondering, "Now has that poor thing put her foot in it or not!"

Apparently not. Mr. Schofield was regarding the "poor thing" quite benignly, almost appreciatively, as if both ready and willing to second the sentiment.

"Just so, my dear. One can have too many relations," he said. "But"—as with an internal amendment on the part of conscience,—"Mrs. George Schofield is an excellent woman: I have not a word to say against Mrs. George Schofield. And to be sure Daisy is a pretty creature."

"Daisy must be the daughter?"

"Oh, there are more daughters than one, though Daisy is the eldest. There are Minnie, and Lottie, and Tottie, besides. But Daisy is your own age, and she is a nice girl enough."

"Are there any sons?"

"Oh, there are sons. There is George; he is a fine young man, in the business now. His father died, you may remember, a few years ago——"

"Yes?"

Monica could always say "Yes" appropriately.

"When he died, it was understood that George should have the partnership."

"Then I suppose he goes in and out with you every day?"

"Well, no—no; hardly that. It would not do for the young men to take it quite so easy as we elder ones do. George goes in an hour earlier, and comes out an hour or so later—not that he is at home so very much later, however; for there are quick trains out to his station, and we have none but slow ones down here, this being a quiet little spot, as you see—but he is later in starting. The other boys are still at school," continued Mr. Schofield. "There are two or three of them;

and the mother is, as I say, an excellent woman, and does her duty by them all. But if you do not choose to see very much of her, or of them, why, you needn't, that's all. Their place is about five miles off, and they are not often my way. If you do not think it necessary to stop at home for Mrs. George Schofield's call, why, please yourselves. You can see her in her own house any day you care to drive over. There is the gong, young ladies, and that means half-an-hour till dinner time;" and he turned towards the house.

"We dine at seven then, I suppose," said Monica, pleasantly. No one would have supposed from her tone that she had ever dined at any other hour.

CHAPTER III.

"TO THINK OF US HERE!"

When first in life's young spring,
Like the gay bee-bird on delighted wing,
She'd stooped to cull the honey from each flower
That bares its breast in joy's luxuriant hour.—WATTS.

DINNER passed agreeably enough; and as soon as it was over our youthful beauties retired to the drawing-room, leaving their uncle to his wine and his reflections.

Monica threw herself back in a broad arm-chair, and laughed aloud. Isabel more soberly smiled, as she sank down upon a couch, arranged a cushion for a support, and put her hand to her brow. "It *is* funny," she said, however.

"Funny! It is the most extraordinary, incredible, inconceivable, outrageous, anomalous state of things imaginable. To think of us, here! *Us*, here! Us, *here*!" varying the emphasis with each repetition. "To think of you and me in this house! Accepted, adopted, posted up in all details, presented with the freedom of the estate, with riding-horses of our own——"

—"Ah!" ejaculated Bell.

"That fetched you, I could see. Oh yes, and I glowed and gushed also. But, seriously, there is something in the whole position so irresistibly comic, so absolutely incongruous, that I am half inclined to believe we are the victims of a first-rate practical jest, and that we shall wake up at any moment, to laugh at ourselves for being so taken in by it."

"I suppose we ought really to consider that we are very well off," observed Bell, sententiously "You know Uncle Lavenham said so. If he approved of our coming, and thought it a good thing for us, it must be all right."

"I am not quite so sure about that."

"What do you mean? He would never have allowed us to come to any low place——"

"Oh, 'low place,' no! And who called this a 'low place'? But I will tell you one of my discoveries, Bell —which is that Uncle Schofield knows just about as much of Uncle Lavenham's way of life as Uncle Lavenham does of Uncle Schofield's. See that?"

"You mean that Uncle Lavenham did not know what we were coming to!"

"He did not know, and he did not care."

"Oh, Monica!"

"You never supposed he did care?"

"I am very fond of Uncle Lavenham," murmured Bell, plaintively. "It seemed a great pity that he should have to go abroad as well as Aunt Fanny. We could have stayed on very well with him in Lowndes Square till the season was over; and then have joined her, wherever she was at the time. We——"

"He did not want us," said Monica, bluntly.

"I daresay it was very natural," proceeded she, after a pause. "I believe in his being ill, because I have noticed that several times of late he has refused invitations which he would really have liked to accept. He did not go to that dinner to the Duke of Cambridge, and he has not been once in his old place on Lord Harbery's drag. Wherefore I am a believer in Uncle Lavenham from ocular demonstration—the only demonstration that would have made me one; and, that being the case, I forgive him. But I will tell you now, my dear

sister, what I did not dare confide to you before, in case you might in a guileless moment let slip a suspicion of it: Uncle Lavenham was simply determined to be rid of us."

Her sister's cheek flushed.

"It *was* a shame," continued Monica, coolly; "but I have got over it, and luckily you did not perceive it for yourself. I knew it would vex you, poor dear,"—in a softened tune—"and I saw no need for vexing you. I only tell you now, because—well, because it may make you happier in this new home than you might otherwise have been."

"Oh, I daresay I shall be happy enough!" said Bell, disconsolately.

"It is at any rate better than knocking about the world without any home at all," suggested her sister, with the shrewdness born of an early sense of dependence. "I have always felt that Uncle Lavenham and Aunt meant us to consider Lowndes Square only as a sort of *pied-à-terre* till something else turned up. Till we married, I suppose, is the plain English of it; and it was assumed moreover, that we were to be pretty quick about that."

Isabel sat still and made no rejoinder.

"You do not see the oddity of it as I do?" proceeded the speaker.

"It is very odd."

"But you see how kind this new uncle is. And he is not disagreeable, and not familiar. He has really a nice manner. I think we shall be able to manage him very well."

"The horses, Monica. I never expected to have horses of our own. Uncle Lavenham never gave us horses—except hired ones."

"Uncle Lavenham never gave us a good many things that I foresee we shall have from Uncle Schofield. This grand piano, for instance. Its tone is perfect; and Aunt Fanny's had grown so old, and was so badly looked after, that it was always out of tune. It will be something to have such a piano to sing to again. Then, though this room is dreadful, the dining-room is not half bad, and the dinner was exceedingly good.

What fruit there was for dessert! I wonder if we shall have strawberries and peaches like those every night. And our own rooms, Bell, my dear, are very very much handsomer than any rooms you and I ever had for our own before. Josephine is in high glee, I can see. The little wretch is as luxurious in her tastes as if she were a duchess; and she was always hinting that her bedroom in London was too small and too dark. Now she has been given a room close to ours, on the other side of yours —did you know that? Well, I shall not say anything to Uncle Schofield, of course, but I let Josephine see that I thought it rather ridiculous. She says the baths are all of marble, and that there is hot water in every corner of the house! I like that. Oh, and another thing—I knew I had something to tell you, but you would keep her so long over your hair that I could not have it out before dinner—you should have seen the meeting between her and Uncle Schofield on the stairs. Evidently, at first sight, he was at a loss to imagine who and what such an apparition could be. He had forgotten about our maid, no doubt. So then he shuffled into a corner, and stood back for her to pass. She would not pass. So then he made a gallant bow, and stepped forward. So then she dropped a pretty curtsey, and tripped after. Then he addressed her in English. Then she replied in gibberish. This he mistook for French. This——"

The door opened, and coffee appeared.

"This is quite the newest rose of the season," drawled Miss Monica, completing her supposed sentence by drawing a fragrant blossom towards her.

Meantime Mr. Schofield was enjoying his glass of port to his heart's content. He had surmounted the ordeal of receiving his nieces; he had gone through the list of his possessions for their benefit; he had eaten his dinner with them; held open the door for them, and seen them depart; and he now had a clear hour before him wherein to chew the cud of all the new and pleasurable sensations gone through within the last few hours.

At all times to sit thus for a while within his pleasant, quiet dining-room at that hour, was agree-

able. It was to him, as to his nieces, a far preferable apartment to the duller, more pretentious bay-windowed apartment on the other side of the house; it faced the west, and the glories of sunset, and the meadows and woodlands beyond, so that altogether it was a sunny, calm abode, and never more inviting than when, as now, the genial rays played upon the bare, polished, fine old mahogany table, covered with its picturesque *débris* of fruits, flowers, and glasses.

On this particular July evening the air was balmy, while the heat of the day was over. The birds had begun to twitter and sing again in the cooler atmosphere; through the open windows came the odor of mignonette, heliotrope, and other sweet-scented blossoms; while bees and gnats hummed up and down on the panes, and a butterfly now and again drifted in, on its way past. Not a disturbing sound fell upon the ear; not a vexing sight marred the peaceful outlook.

Mr Schofield, leisurely reposing in an arm-chair of the finest leather, stretching out his limbs over a carpet of the softest pile, and sipping slow sips of the vintage he best loved, was a very enviable man at a very enviable moment. Hitherto his life, although, as we have said, an estimable, benevolent, and blameless one—nay, one which was deserving both of repect and imitation—had not been without its want as regarded himself. He had done all that in him lay for others; he had found reward in the happiness of many who had owed their happiness to him; and while remembering the poor, he had not been unmindful of the rich. He was not only a worthy, he was a popular personage, and was conscious of the good-will of neighbors and friends, as well as of the blessings of the humble.

But—and it was not only when the "but" had been supplied that he had felt its existence—but he had been lonely. He was a man who liked cheerful, domestic home-life; an inquisitive man; a man inclined to be interested in neighborly concerns, excited over family events; a man who would trudge over every story of a friend's house, who would not be satisfied without inspecting every niche in a friend's garden; a man

who liked to be told things, and to know about things; a man who was always pleased to be invited to a festivity, and who liked nothing better than to give a festivity of his own in return—a man, in short, who ought to have been married, and never had been married, and was never now likely to marry.

If there had at any time been the slightest chance of the latter contingency, the arrangement suggested by Colonel Lavenham had given the idea its death-blow. One woman in the house might have been good, but two were infinitely better; one might have been a necessity, but two meant luxury; one might have been a trouble, but two could amuse themselves; one might have put him out of his way, but two would have a way of their own. In every way two had it.

And then Mr. Schofield had very much amended his first verdict on his nieces' looks by this time. He had blinked his eyes, and almost blushed—it was a trick he had—when the two had come down stairs attired in evening dress, their round, white shoulders and long, tapering arms shown to advantage by black frocks (relics of a by-gone mourning, and voted the thing for home evenings at Flodden Hall)—with their beautiful hair re-arranged by Josephine's deft fingers, with color in their cheeks, and light in their eyes.

He had perceived that he had done injustice to their charms: that Isabel was grace itself—soft, caressing, undulating grace; while Monica—he had drawn a long breath as he surveyed Monica. There was a brilliancy, a power, a pride about Monica, the like of which he had never beheld before. Colonel Lavenham had justly estimated the effect the young London beauty would produce when once seen and once owned by her new relation. It might suit a disappointed man in a peevish moment to term his nieces merely pretty; he knew better; merely pretty girls would never have been produced by him, and vaunted by him, as his brother's orphans had been.

"Let the old fellow once see them, and they are all right" he had confided to his wife in the interim between despatching the letter which had acted as a "feeler" and the reception of its rejoinder. "Let him but cast his

eyes upon Monica, and she will make way for them both."

Nevertheless, it was not, as we have said, until the young ladies had descended, refreshed and rehabilitated, that the desired impression had been fully accomplished.

"Upon my word, I did them but scant justice before," Mr. Schofield had reflected. "I did not take into account dust, and weariness, and heat—and perhaps a little feeling about coming to a new home, and meeting a new relation. I was a little let down, and that was the truth. I thought Londoners must have a different standard of looks from what we North-country folks have. Pale faces and puling figures might suit them, I fancied. But that colonel of theirs knew what he was talking about," —a leisurely sip of the ruby liquid,—"that he did,"—setting the glass down. "Two finer creatures—but Monica is the one! There's a beauty for you! An eye like a wild deer. And she looks—looks—looks—I wonder," suddenly, "what she finds to look at? There is nothing in me to look at. She is taking in everything, though, that girl is. She is no fool. No, nor is the other, neither; though she is a quieter lassie. I fancy Monica takes the lead." Then his thoughts fell into another groove: "They will look a bonny pair on horseback, I'll warrant 'em. I must get them a couple of bays, as good a match as possible, and we'll show the folks about how to do the thing. I had no notion they would ride. Town-bred misses, I thought, would care for nothing but sitting up in an open carriage, or trundling along in a pony-cart. A pony-cart, eh! There's another thing I had forgotten. They will want a pony-cart, or some such little light article, to run about the lanes in. Let me see; there's the single brougham, and the double brougham, and the dog-cart, and the barouche, and—and that's all. They are few enough for young ladies of position. If they fancy a pony-cart, a pony-cart they shall have. Hey, Mrs. George Schofield, I wonder what you will say to it all? I should like to see your face when you come to hear of these doings. Lord! she will think I have gone mad. I shall have some one to pit against her and her George, and all the rest of 'em, now. If Colonel Lavenham's nieces can't hold their own with Daisy

Schofield, give me leave never to have another opinion on the subject, that's all."

It is now time that the Mrs. George Schofield, once before alluded to in these pages, should be presented in due form and at due length to our readers. Mrs. Schofield—she always made a point of being Mrs. Schofield, cousin Joseph being unmarried, as she would explain—Mrs. Schofield then, was by no means a bad sort of woman. Her husband had loved her, her children did love her, her household respected her, her parish benefited by her, and no one could say a syllable against her. But one stubborn fact stood out in bold relief on the other side—it was indisputable that everybody, from the highest to the lowest, from the oldest to the youngest, had a trick of getting out of Mrs. Schofield's way.

If the rector, for example, were about to take the field-path towards the village, and caught a glimpse of a certain blue cotton parasol in the field beyond, Mr. Fairleigh would promptly twitch himself round, and hurry up the high road, dust and all, as fast as he could go. To all appearance the worthy pastor had suddenly recollected a parochial visit to be made in that direction; but somehow, such a recollection was one with which he might never have been smitten had not the above-named blue parasol loomed on the opposite horizon.

If the cards of Mrs. and the Misses Schofield were found upon a neighbor's hall-table on the neighbor's return from an afternoon drive or walk, the neighbor would not, as a rule, express regret. Mrs. Schofield's own children would look at each other, and murmur excuses if their mother desired a companion; the servants would fidget and shuffle if caught and detained; and as for her cousin Joseph—but we shall know more of Mr. Joseph Schofield's sentiments presently.

Now what had this good woman—for she was a good woman, and no one gainsaid it—what had she done to be so treated, so avoided? Out with the worst: Mrs. Schofield was a bore. There are many kinds of bores. Dissertations by the ream might be written, and have been written, anent boredom in all its variations; but there is perhaps one kind of bore which, so far, has scarcely been done full justice to.

It is the bore who challenges your respect, who disarms your satire, who silences your sneer; the bore whom for very shame you cannot snub, whom for very truth's sake you cannot slander; the bore whom in your heart of hearts you designate excellent, admirable, irreproachable; the bore whom to call a bore would be blasphemy.

Such a bore, in nine cases out of ten, is the bore paternal or maternal. You cannot, in your calmer moments, think slightingly of him or her, aware as you are of the many sacrifices made, the endless trouble taken, the cares and pains bestowed, the money spent upon those children, in whom is wrapped up every fibre of the heart's affection. You cannot pooh-pooh the man or woman who toils and strains—aye, and fights and fends, day and night, year after year, for the helpless brood, with their ever-increasing demands and necessities. You would not grudge your approbation of the parent whose daily life is thus given out to others; who has scarce a personality of his or her own; who is, as it were, a lost identity, swallowed up in his or her offspring. That is just what you cannot do; and it is, therefore, on that precise account that this species of bore becomes a bore intolerable, a bore which cannot be borne—no pun, dear reader—a bore for whom the only cure, and the sole remedy, is—flight.

We now see why Mrs. Schofield so often found her path cleared.

"I had an hour of Mrs. Schofield, that dear, good woman, to-day;" it is the parson who is speaking, and he groans as he speaks. "She caught me just at my busiest—of course, one ought not to grudge one's time to a parishioner, and such an excellent creature, too, but," another groan, "I did wish I had managed to get out before she came. Hearing a voice in the porch, I took it into my head that it was Mrs. Fitch, or Mrs. Thomson, with the collecting-books, and I thought I might as well shake hands, and could then run off. If I had known it was Mrs. Schofield! First I had to hear all about George—George is her great topic at the present moment, then about Robert,

then Herbert, then Walter. Next began the girls—Daisy, Minnie, Lottie, Tottie—every one of the four; and if I had not actually *had* to go just as we reached Tottie, we should have begun with George again, and started on a second round. George is an excellent fellow. I have a great regard for George, as I have let the good creature know repeatedly. I have told her, over and over again, that I am sure she has a son who is treading in his good father's steps, and who must be a comfort and a credit to to them all. But one really cannot go on sympathizing and congratulating forever."

Now this was just what Mrs. Schofield wished every person she met with to do. Introduced to a perfect stranger, five minutes would not have elapsed before the extraordinary talents and achievements, the remarkable inclinations and idiosyncrasies of some one or other of her many young people were being vaunted, having been insinuated somehow or other into the conversation, from which, once admitted, there was no chance of their ejection. George was his mother's darling; but if—unaware of the nature of the ground—heedless ignorance or slavish good-nature encouraged George as a theme, such folly brought its own punishment. George only gave place to Robert, Robert to Herbert, and so on, as every friend, relation, or acquaintance of the amiable prattler, now knew to their cost.

It may be said that, after all, there was a species of egotism underlying this. Perhaps there was. Joseph Schofield thought there was; and he was a fairly shrewd diviner of the passions of the human breast;—but nevertheless, it was, as we have said before, an egotism which the world can forgive so long as the world can slip aside, and let the torrent pass.

As long as I am not obliged to hearken to your recital of the honors which have crowned the head of your firstborn, my dear lady, I have no objection that you should take a mother's pride in them, and boast of them in other quarters. Go and buttonhole the good rector, if you will. Prate in old Mr. Dumby's deaf ear for as long as you like. Exhaust the poor invalid who cannot get away from you, if your con-

science is clear to do so—but let me off. Then will I call you the best of parents, a paragon of maternal virtue.

It was only the unlucky ones who fresh from torture had escaped maimed and bruised, who would now and again rise up against their tormentor for the nonce. A hundred to one they will be sorry afterwards, repent, and recapitulate the excellences which had been obliterated under the teeth of the harrow. Nay, in the pangs of their remorse, they would take themselves to task for inhumanity; and thus, in the long run, the worthy, the admirable, the amiable Mrs. Schofield would score by her very crime.

But imagine such a personage brought face to face with Monica Lavenham.

This was how the meeting came about; a heavy thunderstorm had prevented the expedition which had been planned by the girls and their uncle, and necessitated the former's remaining at home for the greater part of the following afternoon. They had forgotten all about their threatened visitor, having received letters and notes which had stirred up another train of ideas, some of which indeed, had demanded consideration. They had given up the day's project directly its abandonment had been seen to be inevitable, with the equanimity of young people who had not been spoilt in that respect—in truth, the two had had to give up their own way tolerably often in the Lavenham household of late—and had permitted Rushton to send a telegram, while settling down to writing and music, until the lightning had become too vivid, and the thunder too appalling.

As the storm died away, however, cheerfulness had been resumed, and Monica was in the act of saying, "I think we might go off for a walk; the sun is peeping out, and the rain is nearly over," when the words died away on her lips, and she drew back from the window hastily. A carriage had turned in at the gate. "I believe it is Mrs. George Schofield," she cried.

PART II.

CHAPTER IV.

IT WAS ABOMINABLE OF MONICA.

"Nor give thy humors way:
God gave them to you under lock and key."—HERBERT.

MRS. GEORGE SCHOFIELD it was, whose horses, all in a steam 'twixt rain and heat, now stood before the entrance door.

Mrs. Schofield had been in a vast hurry to call upon her cousin Joseph's young relations, as she usually was to call upon any new comer to the neighborhood, to the annoyance of her children, and the amusement of every one else. "If mama would only let people alone for ever so short a time," one or another at the Grange would murmur, "it would be such a comfort. We know quite enough people as it is. Why, in all the world, should we fly to knock at every house directly it becomes inhabited? Every year more and more houses are being built; and to every one of these mama must start off, post haste, before the people have so much as had time to turn round! It makes such a host to invite whenever we give anything. But it is of no use talking to mama. Had mama been in the Ark, she would have been miserable until she had made acquaintance with the wives of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and found their cards in her berth—or whatever did duty for a hall table."

It must not be inferred from this, however, that the young Schofields were unsociable; the truth being that they were only rather more independent, and rather more pre-occupied than was their mother.

They were very busy young people. They were full of resources; great in hobbies. There was not a taste nor a pursuit in vogue at the time, but one or other of them would infallibly become to it a convert. Several had collections: collections of eggs; collections of moths and butterflies; collections of coins; collections of stamps. Some had joined societies: different societies for improvement and cultivation. George had a carpenter's shop and joiner's bench; Robert cultivated his garden; and the younger boys had pets of every description.

The girls on their part were scarcely less industrious and successful. It was their fond parent's boast that no one of them ever knew an idle moment. Not being herself a clever woman, and having a great deal of the same kind of energy without the vent of youthful emulation, and the benefit of early teaching, Mrs. Schofield's own ardor took the form, as has been before hinted, of a continual and unwearied persistence in cultivating neighborly intercourse, with what result we already know.

But who was there to drop a hint of this, outside the domestic circle? Within it, mama would be told pretty freely the mind of any son or daughter she came across; each and every admonition only, as the phrase is, rolling like water off a duck's back. But in the world without, who was there foolish enough, or unkind enough, to be uncivil? The Grange was a good house to go to; Mrs. Schofield's roomy wagonette a good perch to fall back upon after at a croquet party, or a garden party; her night quarters snug ones when a ball was the *raison d'être*; her dinners, dances, and suppers, excellent in themselves. To quarrel with such a hostess would have argued little short of idiocy; more particularly when there was so simple a mode of adjusting the position, namely that before mentioned;—it was easy to get out of her way. Unless, therefore, her presence were particularly necessary, unless—it is a shame to say it, but it was so—unless there were the prospect of her being of *use* of any sort, the amiable matron's company was not sought after.

Thus, on the present occasion, she had inquired

which of the girls would drive over with her to call on their newly arrived cousins, with her usual hopeful expectation of acquiescence—an expectation that past experience had never been able either to damp or diminish.

"Oh, mama, are you really going over to call at Flodden Hall to-day? Why should you go to-day?" had been the first rejoinder, being Miss Daisy Schofield's little spoke in the wheel.

"Well, my dear, it is the right thing to do; and my cousin Joseph will expect it; and the young ladies will expect it themselves."

"Oh, mama," (Daisy generally began with "Oh, mama"), "they won't. They would never think about it."

"Of course they would think about it, Daisy, and very well they might. I ought to be the first to call, being very nearly if not quite a relation; and besides I told cousin Joseph I should go."

"Oh, mama, why did you do that?"

"Why? Because I am going, my dear; and I thought that some of you would have liked to go too. The Lavenham girls are your own age, yours and Minnie's, and will be nice friends for you."

But she had not been able to make any of them see it in that light. Daisy had put out her lips at the idea. She did not want friends; she had her own friends and as many friends as she cared for.

How could she possibly lose a whole afternoon sitting stuffing in mama's hot landau, when she had such a lot of things to do? She had a new part of her sonata to practice; her drawing for the drawing society to finish; her half-hours reading for the reading society to get through; besides which there were flowers to be brought in for the drawing-room; and Mrs. Minx had promised to send down to the Grange her book of patterns, and the book of patterns was to be returned as soon as ever Daisy had chosen which she would have for a new summer skirt.

Minnie, who had been next applied to, had been peevish at the bare suggestion. It was too bad; it was just the way she was always treated. Why should

she have to go, just because Daisy did not choose to go? Why should she always be the one to be set upon, whenever mama wanted somebody?

She had been out with mama twice since either Daisy or the rest had been once; and she had a headache, a horrible headache, &c., &c., &c.

Lottie and Tottie, whose holidays had begun, and who were therefore at home also, had been equally frank in their resolutions. Lottie had made up her mind to go and see her own particular friend Mary Bond that afternoon; she had not seen Mary Bond for ages—not since last Friday; and Mary would wonder what had come over her; and she had fixed to go; while Tottie, calmly affirming that she hated driving, took up work-box and wools, and marched off alleging that she intended to begin her new crewel chair-back under the trees, on the croquet ground.

"It really seems as if I could never get any one of you to like to come," the poor mother had at length averred (by her accents she might have made the discovery for the first time); "one would have thought a nice drive on a fine afternoon—and the afternoon will be beautiful now the storm is over—one would have thought it would have done you all good; and we might have gone over a nice large party——"

"Oh, a nice large party!" The groan had been Daisy's, but the sentiment had been written on her sisters' face as well as on her own. "When will you learn, mama, that of all things we detest going about in 'nice large parties'? I am sure you have heard us say a hundred times that we do; and yet you *will* ask us——"

"Well, my dear, well," placidly; "but I thought you would have liked to call on your cousins. To see some new faces,——"

"And new faces are just what we don't care to see."

"Goodness gracious, Daisy! to hear a girl like you say that! Well, I must go by myself, then."

"Of course if you *want* me, mama," reluctantly.

"Oh, never mind, my dear."

"But I do think Minnie might go," with renewed

energy. "She has nothing to do; and supposing she has a headache, the drive would do her good."

"Nothing to do!" protested the injured Minnie; "I have a great deal to do. I have some letters to write, and I promised to take the *Queen* to Mrs. Carter—you know I did. So there! How can you say I have nothing to do?"

Poor Mrs. Schofield had at length been fain to declare that she was quite willing and happy to take her drive, and make her call by herself; nay, she had almost gone the length of protesting that the girls were in the right, and that it would have been waste of their precious time to have gone with her.

To be sure, she had felt a little lonely when surveying the empty space in the large, broad landau; and a little melancholy when compelled perforce to hold her tongue from sheer want of a listener; but once arrived at cousin Joseph's front door, she was herself again. She was now all fidgety expectation and excitement; burning to inspect the new comers; to see how they would look beside her Daisy: to talk about Daisy, and about George, and the boys, and Minnie, and Lottie, and Tottie. Perhaps in her secret soul she did not regret the absence of any other member of her family, once the long lonesome drive was over; once Flodden Hall was safely reached, and the young ladies found at home and chat begun.

She had now no fear of being brought to book, corrected, and contradicted. In consequence, she was, if we may so speak, at her best; and it may safely be affirmed that neither Monica nor Isabel Lavenham had ever in their lives entertained a visitor of the kind.

They possessed a large London acquaintance; they knew a fair number of people in the country, people to whose seats they would go for hunt balls and shooting parties, and who would occasionally turn up at the smart watering-places to which Colonel and Mrs. Lavenham had always more or less resorted before their grand determination had been arrived at,—but neither town nor country mice had been in the slightest degree like Mrs. George Schofield. The fond, foolish, effusive,

long winded, maternal drone is rarely found in society.

Mothers, they had known, it is true; mothers who, as Monica declared afterwards, had been "bad enough," whose one topic and one source of interest had been some idolized darling at Eton or Oxford—(it is usually in the male sex that the idolized darlings are found, as we all know)—but there was a breadth, a hopelessness, a comprehensiveness in the affections of the ample lady who was now seated, full spread, on cousin Joseph's sofa, which it was well nigh impossible to meet and overcome. In the present instance, even the usual faint resistance was not offered. The Miss Lavenhams sat stupefied, and the waves rolled over their heads.

First of all, Mrs. Schofield was anxious to know when her young cousins would come over to the Grange, and make the acquaintance of the Grange and of all its inmates for themselves? The Grange was only a few miles off; within a nice, easy drive; most of the way led through pretty lanes; and the young people were longing to know them; and to know what they were fond of, what they would "take up," and what they would "go in" for. All her young people "went in" for something or other. Her girls were always busy; and so for that matter, were her boys. Although, to be sure, some of them had not so much time for their own affairs as the others; George, for instance. George had come home for good, and was a junior partner in the business, his father's business, and doing well, and went in to the office every day regularly.

He went in by an earlier train than cousin Joseph did, because of course everyone could understand that it would never do for the young men to go in by the old men's trains—the young men's train in the morning was full three-quarters of an hour before the old men's train; and George came out later than his cousin did, too; he only came out in time for dinner; and they had only a sort of tea-dinner all the summer, because the young people liked to stop out so late, and, do what she would, she found there was no getting them in.

So that she really did not see so much of George as she might. Although, to be sure, he had his Saturday afternoons and Sundays, and she was not so strict about

Sunday as some people were, and thought there was no harm in her young people taking a walk with other young people on Sunday afternoons, and bringing their friends in to tea after it. George had many nice young men among his friends, and their Sunday teas were always very merry; and no trouble to anyone, since the cloth could always be laid ready, with extra plates and cups, before the servants went out, in order that everybody might come in who chose.

She did think it was hard if such nice young men as George's friends might not have their tea, if they had walked out to see them on a Sunday,—but she knew some people who thought otherwise, and never liked the sound of her Sunday teas. Although, to be sure, she always took care that all the party went off to church in the evening afterwards; their church was only a mile off, a nice walk over the fields, and the young men never seemed to think it a hardship; and as for her own young people, she had never known anyone of them so much as wish to stop away.

For one single half-minute the speaker paused to take breath.

"Pray go on," said Monica Lavenham, with profound earnestness; and even Isabel, who knew Monica, wondered what she would now be at.

Go on? Oh, the dear creature! A nice, pleasant face, and so attentive. Oh, Mrs, Schofield would go on (delightedly) with all the pleasure in life, my dear. What did they want to know about next? Not but that they would do a great deal better to come over and see for themselves; for, to be sure, she was a bad hand at description, and the girls were longing to see them, only they were so busy. But would Miss Isabel and Miss Monica come over to luncheon? They might depend on her and the girls at luncheon, although, to be sure, George would not be present.

"Except on Saturdays and Sundays," interposed Monica sweetly.

"To be sure, yes. But then on Saturdays I am afraid, I am in a sort of way afraid that George is engaged for next Saturday, I am nearly sure I heard him say so, and——"

"Then on Sunday?" suggested the accommodating Miss Lavenham.

"On Sunday you would hardly get over in time after church, I am afraid. It is a longish walk, and cousin Joseph, you see, is particular about not taking out his horses on Sunday. Cousin Joseph has his own ideas about horses."

"Of course, but we should not want horses. We might walk over to the Sunday afternoon tea," proceeded Monica, on whom her sister's eyes were now bent in a sort of mute amazement. "We might come in to the merry tea after the walk, might we not, Mrs. Schofield? We are not so strict as some people are about Sunday either; and we do walk on that day, I assure you. We walk in the park, when it is not too full of people. It would not do to go when it is very full of people, would it? But there are quiet places, nice Sunday places——"

"Yes, yes," cried Mrs. Schofield, beaming all over.

"Where one can take a book and read."

"To be sure, yes."

"And just look up now and then, if a prince or a princess is passing."

"Lor', now!" a little doubtfully.

"You would not have us *not* look up if a prince or princess were passing, would you, Mrs. Schofield?"

"Oh, dear me, no; but——"

"But of course we look down at our books again, in a great hurry directly they are gone,—especially if they have not taken any notice of us. And now and then there are other curious people going by also. And the young men walk about. But then they are very nice young men, quite like George's young men."

A shade of suspicion on her visitor's face.

"So I am sure you would not wish us to be hard on them. If we walk over to your Sunday tea, I do hope there will be some nice young men——"

"Oh, you may depend upon *that*," and Mrs. Schofield rose, a little flurried and puzzled.

"But would you expect us to go to church with them afterwards? Because if so, how are we to get back here? I am afraid, after all, we shan't be able

to come this Sunday; but we must arrange for it some other Sunday, and meantime we will drive over, and put up with finding only you and the girls at home. As they are too busy to come, and see us, we will go and see them; and, perhaps, if George can spare a Saturday away from the parties——"

It was abominable of Monica. What moved the girl to behave in a manner so cruel, to ridicule a harmless woman who was such poor game, and so easily brought down, it is hard to say. Possibly she was out of sorts from the effects of the thunderstorm, from the disappointment respecting the day's expedition, from a general dissatisfaction with everything and everybody; for it was really rather an unusual thing for her to be barefacedly rude; it was only when people were aggressively ill-bred and arrogant themselves that this sprightly young lady was apt to let loose her tongue in return.

She had not given vent to a single scornful remark before her uncle; she had made the best of the situation, even when the situation had fully developed itself, with her sister; and she had written a cheerful, uncomplaining letter to her relations in London. It was strange that what was after all only the babble of a poor inoffensive creature, who knew no better, should have had power to vex her haughty spirit,—but so it was.

"I was wild—wild," she burst out afterwards. "I tell you, Bell, I could have struck that poor unconscious woman. Yes, I could. Don't stare at me. It was not *her*, can't you see? It was the whole thing; but it was she who brought it home to me; she who made me rebel against it afresh, just as I had got the better of myself, and had—had almost become reconciled. Don't you see how she did it? As she meandered on and on, I seemed to hear a voice within whispering: 'This is what you have come to. This is the life before you. This is a specimen of the people you have come among.' And then another idea rose to confront me, seeming to laugh at my misery; to laugh at me, to mock me, to mock us both. Shall we two become like these Daisys and Minnies, and 'go in' for them and their

ways, and their societies and their Sunday teas, and their nice young men? At Rome one must do as Rome does, you know. And these are our relations, Bell; these are our own mother's own blood-relations —the young ones are at least. We cannot put them aside, refuse their invitations, and deny ourselves to them. We *must* meet, and we must behave properly, we must go to their dreadful 'parties' and play croquet, and—oh, when it all stared me in the face, and when I thought of what we have left, of what we have lost—of the dear old life which seems now so far, far away—of the people whom we have known, whom we may never know again, and who will soon cease to think about us—of how we shall be forgotten, lost sight of, dropped—of how we have already been given up, and abandoned, while yet everything is going on just as it always does!"—Her voice faltered. "The Park will be full this afternoon, and it is the day of Harry Blenham's polo match at Hurlington—did you remember?—and of Lady Beately's tea, and,—and *we are here!* And what is worse, far worse, it will be always so, Bell. Next year, when the merry month of May begins, we shall know all that is beginning too; the houses being re-opened, the window-boxes getting filled, the new carriages being bought, the dressmakers working against time, the invitations flocking in, and—and *we here!* No one will give us a thought"—she broke off short.

"But Uncle Lavenham thought that very likely Uncle Schofield might take a house in town."

"Uncle Lavenham thought so?" Monica's voice rang with impatient scorn. "What did Uncle Lavenham know? I tell you, child, that Uncle Lavenham neither knew nor cared what became of us, once we were safely delivered out of his hands. He wanted to make the parting easy for everybody; and so he thought of all the sugar plums he could heap together, and filled our mouths with them. We believed him; even I believed him, till I came, and saw. Last night I saw much; this morning I saw still more. Bell, we were a bale of goods for which Uncle Lavenham had no further accommodation, wherefore we were shunted here.

And here Uncle Schofield intends us to remain. Do you see? *He* is no more likely to take us to town next year than to take us to the ends of the earth. We have only been in his house four and twenty hours, but that is enough to show me as much. He will be as kind as possible; he will give us everything we want; we shall have liberty to come and go as we please; our own money is supposed to be enough to pay all odds ands ends of small expenses, and he will supply the great things of life,"—

—"Then why cannot we go sometimes to town by ourselves?"

"I do not say we may not go, sometimes, if we are asked. But we certainly could not go otherwise."

"Well; people will ask us," said Bell, confidently.

"Will they?" Monica's lip curled. "I have been thinking it over, and I do not know one who will—no, not one. Did you notice how 'a few days' was the limit of the hospitality proffered even at this present time, even when we were before their very eyes, large as life? By next year our very memories will have faded. No one will care to have us, Bell." Slowly: "We have not made any real friends, we have only known a number of pleasant people. And we should not be the very best of visitors, neither. We should give a great deal of trouble. We should not be content unless we had as much done for us as poor aunt Fanny did. We should be miserable if we did not go to all the best things. We should be tiresome about keeping hours. We should want the use of carriages. I am afraid we should only do for stopping in great houses; and even in great houses everybody cannot have carriages and horses and meals exactly when they want them."

"I suppose you are right, Monica; but still I can't help hoping, you know. Uncle Schofield may——"

"He *may* do anything, he *may* be anything. I would not damp your expectations, poor dear, only I think you must be careful not to give them utterance. Bell, we must not show we are thinking of anything of the kind;" with emphasis: "remember that, Bell. You will, will you not? I am quite sure, certain, that

it would not only be very unkind, but dreadfully imprudent not to seem satisfied, grateful, and happy. It won't be easy, but no doubt it will be good for us," bitterly. "We have come down in the world, sister; we are no longer what we were. We shall no longer be able to know whom we will; to associate with whom we will. It is just a little hard upon us, young as we are, to be brought up so soon and so suddenly, when life was all before us; we did not expect it, we—we," and here, to the infinite discomfiture of her less volatile auditor, the speaker's breath came and went, her voice broke, and looking at her, Isabel could see that her large, violet eyes were full and brimming with tears.

CHAPTER V.

BELL'S HIGH MISDEMEANOR.

Give not thy tongue too great liberty, lest it take thee a prisoner.
—QUARLES,

IN the course of a very short time, everybody who had sufficient propinquity, or position, or presumption, to venture upon calling on the Miss Lavenhams had done so—or, according to their uncle, the whole neighborhood had done its part. He was radiant; his nieces were not. They had their own views upon the subject, views which the following conversation will serve to explain.

"Another disappointment," exclaimed Isabel, throwing down some cards, which she had eagerly taken up the moment before; "I made sure it was the Dorriens at last. I saw the carriage from my seat on the bank, and it was a better sort of carriage than the usual ones; so that I said to myself, 'Dorriens, Dorriens, you have come at last!' And I hurried down as soon as ever the carriage had departed. And now!" and she eyed

the luckless cards in fresh disgust, and turned disconsolately away.

Monica said nothing. Her countenance also wore an air of vexation, one had almost said of anxiety.

"I wonder if they will ever come," continued Bell, fretfully. "We have been here a whole month, and surely they might have found us out before this. Monica," as with a sudden thought, "can it be that they don't wish to find us? Can it be," apprehensiveness stealing into her tone, "that the only people from whom we had any hope, the only people who knew anything about us before we came to this dreadful place, and the only people on whom we had placed any kind of dependence, are going to fail us now? That they are not going even to know us?"

"It looks a little like it, Bell."

"Of course they would have a long way to come. Cullingdon is ten miles from here; eight or ten Uncle Schofield said; he was not quite sure which. Oh, I did not say any more to him, I assure you,—I recollected that we were not to force the Schofield family on the notice of the Dorriens, and all that Uncle Lavenham said about it,—but I thought it could do no harm merely to inquire the distance between us and them, and he told me that at the outside it could not be more than ten miles. Ten miles is not very far over country roads, is it?"

"Not *too* far, at all events."

"And though aunt Fanny said Lady Dorrien was old, old people can always drive; look at old Mrs. Hesketh and Lady Charlotte Boydell, they drive all day long."

"And Lady Dorrien is not their age, I should fancy. Aunt Fanny did not speak of her as very old."

"It seems so odd when the son actually knows the Schofields too."

"Yes, it is odd."

"What are you thinking of? You have something in your thoughts when you answer like that. You are puzzling it out, as you often do, you wise creature; and then you will give poor stupid me the benefit of your puzzlements. Now for the benefit," slipping her

arm around the other's slim waist, as the two strolled into the drawing room, where they were now quite at home, and which had been vastly improved by the circumstance. "What has become of the Dorriens, Monica *mia?*" continued Isabel playfully. "Read me the riddle of the Dorriens, learned sage."

But Monica was not smiling. "I am thinking," she began slowly.

"And what are you thinking?"

"I am thinking—can it be *because* the son knows the Schofields—do you understand me?"

"Why, he cannot suppose that we—that you and I—he knows that we are not Schofields. You cannot mean *that?*"

"*That* is just what I do mean."

"But Monica dear, he knows us——"

"Knows us? no. He——"

"Knows who we are, and what we are."

"Pshaw! Who is going to think of that? We have never met him, we have never even met the old people. Sir Arthur saw uncle Lavenham at the club, and uncle Lavenham came home declaring that Lady Dorrien would look after us. We have learned by this time how much of what uncle Lavenham said at that time is to be relied upon——"

"Oh, Monica, you do speak unkindly."

"I cannot help it; I feel unkindly. I think uncle Lavenham did not care how much we suffered, afterwards, nor how cruelly our eyes might be opened in the end, so long as we got off comfortably, and without a scene. If Sir Arthur Dorrien ever said anything at all about us—which I begin to doubt——"

"You forget that aunt Fanny saw Lady Dorrien, and that she said the same thing."

"Ah yes; I had forgotten that. Then I suppose there was *some* truth in it; but I really begin to wonder very much whether——"

"But the Schofields told Mr. Dorrien we were here, and he said something about his parents."

Monica shook her head. "If it has come to that, Bell, we are at a low pass. If it has come to our depending on Daisy Schofield's word for it that the Dorrien's on 'said something' about his parents—good lack!"

and she laughed with some of her accustomed mirthfulness, a mirthfulness which any sense of the ridiculous seldom failed to inspire. "Nay, my dear Bell," Monica now continued more cheerfully, "to be candid with you, I do not imagine that our connection with the Schofield family is likely to do us much good with people of our own sort. A knowledge of 'the widow Schofield and her brood'—do you remember uncle Lavenham's voice?—will hardly advance our claims on the Dorrien interest."

"But we are not like them," murmured Isabel, resentfully, "The Dorriens might know that."

"How are they to know it? They know that we are nearly related. They know that we have come to live with uncle Schofield; and they know that he is 'uncle Schofield.' We are not all Lavenham, you must remember, Bell. We really have Schofield blood in our veins,"—Bell tossed her head,—"and it is of no use our forgetting what everybody about is determined to remember. Do you not see how we are claimed as Schofields, as Schofield representatives upon every side? How even Mr. Fairleigh—the person most like a gentleman of anyone we have yet seen—how even he instantly began to talk to us of our grandfather and grandmother? While, as for the other people, they never have 'your uncle,' or 'your cousins' out of their mouths."

"Oh, *them!*" said Isabel, contemptuously. "I don't care what they think, or what anybody thinks, if only the Dorriens know who we are. Monica," and she paused.

"Well?"

"Hadn't—hadn't Mrs. Schofield better ask this young Dorrien to meet us?"

"Good heavens, no! No, that I could not bear," exclaimed Monica, with almost a stamp of her foot. "Bell, whatever you do, do not let *that* be done. Bell, you have not been hinting for it, already, have you? Oh, I am sure you have; I know you have," as she read the truth in the guilty face oppposite. "Oh, you tiresome——!"

"I—you—do listen—do wait a moment. You are so ridiculous—I will tell you exactly how it happened, if

you will only hear me," implored the culprit, confusion and submission in every lineament. "Daisy was talking about this Harry Dorrien, and saying that he had been over there every day this week, as the family are all at Cullingdon; and she said that, though they do not visit the parents—or rather the parents do not visit them—that Harry, as she called him, always came to the Grange as often as ever he could. I said something about uncle Lavenham and aunt Fanny knowing Sir Arthur and Lady Dorrien in London, and that I—I——"

"You wished to know them here?"

"No—no—no; I did not indeed, for I knew you would have been angry, if I had. I only said that *if* we met the son, he might let his parents know——"

"Oh, you, Bell!"

"Really and truly, Monica, it dropped out in the easiest manner possible. Nobody could have seen anything in it And Daisy is not like you; she is not clever, she grinds away at her societies, and her lectures, and classes,—but even I can see that it is all a sort of make-believe. You are as quick as lightning, while she——"

"There, there; don't think you are going to soften me by flattery. I am really very angry—very angry indeed, do you hear? And I wish you had done nothing of the kind. I wish you had bitten your little tongue out before you descended to the level of talking to Daisy Schofield about the Dorriens; but as you have done so, and as she has apparently taken no notice of it, perhaps no great harm has been done. But one thing—why did you not tell me this before?"

"How do you mean? There was nothing to tell."

"There was this to tell, that you had been talking about the Dorriens to the Schofields."

"Only to Daisy; and I told you that before."

"We had agreed that we were not to mention them."

"She spoke of them first."

"Now, Bell, no evasions. When did you say that about Harry Dorrien? Now, the simple truth; the truth I will have. So!" And Miss Monica put on the look which everyone instinctively obeyed, and which her sister Isabel in particular had never dared to trifle with since she had come to years of discretion.

"I only said it yesterday," she now murmured, meekly.

"And that was why you flew at those cards, to-day?"

"Yes."

"You thought Daisy had made her mother invite this Dorrien boy to meet us, and that *that* had stirred up the parents to come over?"

"Ye-es."

"You might at least have taken me into your confidence."

Bell hung her head.

"You knew I should have been angry; but at least I should not have been hurt. If you would only—only be truthful; if you would not hide things!" and she rose and walked to the window, her tone betraying wounded feeling.

"I am sorry, Monica."

"It is no great matter, of course," and Monica gulped down something in her throat. "But there are only we two, and we have to fight the world together. If I could only depend upon you," and she paused again.

"I always mean to do what you like," protested the feebler creature. "I—but sometimes, you frighten me, and then I fib. I can't help fibbing when you frighten me."

Monica was silent.

"Forgive me, Monica."

With a sudden swift movement Monica stepped forward, kissed the uncovered brow before her, and left the room.

"Forgive her?" murmured she, to herself. "Oh yes, I forgive her. It would be hard if I could not forgive her more than that, poor thing; but oh, if I could only make her understand! She will never see, can never feel how paltry a thing it is to lie. Even with me, with *me*, she cannot be open and true, if she has any motive for concealment. I would not tell a lie for the whole world," cried the proud girl, in the fulness of her heart. It never once occurred to her that she lied both in word and in deed daily.

By nature Monica Lavenham was sincere, courageous, noble; education had smirched and dimmed every attribute. It yet remained to be seen whether of the two, the inherent or the acquired being, would triumph. To be adroit, subtle, pleasing to those whom it was for her advantage to please, was not only defensible in Miss Lavenham's eyes, it was a part of her creed. She believed in the fine art of "humbugging." We have seen moreover, that she could be bitterly sarcastic and cruelly ironical. That also she believed in. Fools and ninnies, pomposity and absurdity in any shape, ought to be shown up, and that without recommendation to mercy. But all of this, she would have told you, was an entirely different matter from the deception of a friend, or an ally —from the resorting to subterfuge out of fear.

Isabel had practised such kind of deceit from infancy, and it had never ceased to disturb the other that she would still do so. Monica would not have minded any number of polite fictions, or what she might probably have termed necessary adaptations, on her sister's part; neither would she have objected to an actual exaggeration, distortion, or romance. Only very precise and matter-of-fact people, she argued, supposed it obligatory to stick to set phrases; —but what she could not stand was the cowardice of Isabel's falsehoods. Those who knew Monica best would perhaps have seen what she did not herself suspect—that it was more the cowardice than the falsehood which moved her.

Consider what a training the poor girl had had. She was not yet twenty years of age. Before she was seven she had lost a mother's influence and example; from that time till within the last few years there had been merely the surveillance of foreign governesses, alternating with the indulgence of a careless father; and, lastly, the maxims of a thorough-paced man of the world, who would have done infinitely less mischief by letting the youthful soil lie fallow, than by sowing in it his seeds of baleful wisdom and pernicious lore.

And the two fair young creatures who had come to him so confidingly, and placed their trust in him so completely, had been at the age of all ages most receptive, most easily impressed. He had himself been

surprised, agreeably and flatteringly surprised, by the avidity with which his instructions had been drunk in, and the effect he desired produced. He had exulted in having, as he would declare, given his brothers' orphans not only a roof over their heads, but paternal care and guardianship, and plenty of good sound advice; so that when the time came for them to stand upon their own feet, they would need nobody to tell them what to do, and how to do it. "Sharp girls, clever girls, and will stand no nonsense, I tell you," he had been wont to confide; "I have done my duty by them; and they know a thing or two they would never have got hold of but for me. I have shown them how to make their way in the world, and we shall see them do it, and then they will know whom to thank for it."

But this had been before the threatened dissolution of the home in Lowndes Square.

Consequent upon that upheaval of all projected plans and projects, there had been a brief period of discontent; a feeling that the brilliant young beauties had hardly answered sufficiently to the whip as it were, in having failed to make the couple of great matches Colonel Lavenham had so confidently predicted for them. They had had two seasons, and plenty of opportunities during intervening months; had had gayeties in the provinces and on the Continent; and the Miss Lavenhams had been noticed and admired wherever they had gone. Offers had not been wanting, but regarding these there had been no friction in the united little party; since none had been deemed sufficiently unexceptionable either by uncle, aunt, or by the young ladies themselves, to be worthy of so much as a consultation. "They will do better yet," Colonel Lavenham had cried gayly, and had been well content to begin another campaign.

But then had come the falling of the curtain. Towards the close of the last unsatisfactory London season there had been clouds in the air. The lady of the house had been an almost openly avowed invalid. There had been debates and cogitations. There had been pros and cons about almost every subject of family interest. The gentleman had been pondering and

ruminating anent his clubs and his commission. The younger ladies had been wondering, and sympathizing, and trying to find out what might be their own future. Everyone had been uneasy and suspicious; until at length, as had been already shown, there had been a feeling of entire exhaustion, and a rebound of strange relief when the bolt had been actually shot, and the separation agreed upon.

In all of this Monica and Isabel had stood by each other. They had always so stood. There had been times now and again when Bell's soft duplicity, her inveterate habit of concealing or prevaricating, had aroused the indignation of her sister, and it had required all the submission and woe-begone looks of the former to bring round the latter.

But in their great calamity they had been drawn closer together than they had ever been before. Monica had experienced such an infinite pity not only for her fellow sufferer but for herself, that it had seemed to soften her high spirit as nothing had ever softened it before. She had had no second outbreak, such as had amazed Isabel after Mrs. Schofield's first visit. She had endured neighbor after neighbor, torture after torture; and had felt only more and more compassion for their two forlorn selves, so hopelessly stranded, so wantonly ill-treated. It had made her more tender with Isabel than she had ever been; and she had told herself that there would now be no more concealments; that she and the equally luckless Bell were one in heart at least; and that whatever of trouble, grief, or vexation of spirit the sudden wreckage of their old life had brought upon them, out of the wreck had arisen one great good—the perfect understanding between two who had now no one else in the wide world belonging to them. It was this which made Monica smart and wince beneath the trifling instance of her sister's secretiveness above narrated. It had been after all but a little thing, a mere holding back of a very, very unimportant admission, but it had been the featherlet which had betrayed from what quarter the wind blew. Isabel was not yet cured; the old nature was not yet wholly eradicated.

To Bell's mind, however, the misfortune was that no

good had come of it all. Directly Monica's kiss had fallen on her brow she had revived into complacency, well pleased to have got over an ugly scene, and secure of no more being now said to her about it. She had then felt anew that the Dorriens would be sure to come —Monica's very displeasure meant that she had felt they must now come—and for some days subsequently she rose every morning more and more confident that that day at any rate would not pass without bearing its expected fruit.. They never came; and then, as we have said, Miss Isabel Lavenham began to feel a tardy contrition for the fault which had been so unproductive. "I wish I had said nothing about it to Daisy," she allowed to herself. "Monica was right. It has done no good. If I had told Monica at the time, she would have managed better:" thus, like many another delinquent, only regretting the misdemeanor when the misdemeanor took the shape of a penalty.

Why had not the Dorriens come? The Dorriens were—we are going to surprise our readers—as eager to wait upon the Lavenhams as the Lavenhams were to have them do so. What was the meaning of this eagerness? We are going to surprise our readers still more. It was because the latter were cousins of the Schofields at the Grange.

How the dark eyes of Monica and Isabel would have opened could they have known the truth! How often would the eyes of you and me, dear reader, open, could we know the real, actual, unvarnished facts about much that happens to us. We think ourselves highly honored by some special act of graciousness, while in truth we are the recipients of a civility which no one else will take the trouble of picking up, and which at length by the merest hap has drifted our way. We take umbrage, on the other hand, at some unpardonable affront or dire neglect. We have simply not been thought of at all. Other motives have been at work, some great object has had to be attained, and we—we who had brooded in unhappy, poignant wrath over our wrong, wondering to what the blow was due, what we had done or said to bring it upon our heads, how we should conceal the smart, and let not the world know

of it—we have been all the while as though we were not, in the matter.

The Lavenhams, all in all to themselves, and of first-rate importance in the social world around their uncle's residence, were to the Dorriens simply connections of Daisy Schofield.

Poor Monica! Poor Isabel! How would their blue patrician blood have boiled and bubbled had they but known!

But now comes another mystery. Such being the case, why, in the name of all that was wonderful and mysterious, did not Sir Arthur and Lady Dorrien, who really and truly had told Colonel and Mrs. Lavenham that they would look after their young relations when in exile, why had they not done so? Why had they never gone over, in solemn state, to make the acquaintance of Mrs. George Schofield? Why had none of the young people ever been asked to Cullingdon? Why———

But we will answer every "Why?" in our next chapter.

CHAPTER VI.

CULLINGDON.

No noisy neighbors enter here,
No intermeddling stranger's near.—COTTON.

THERE could not have existed a more romantic, time-worn, and suggestive abode than the ancient manor of Cullingdon, the seat of Sir Arthur Luke Dorrien, baronet.

Every niche and gable, every gateway and archway, was chronicled among the archæological features of a parish as old as itself, and even the black-beamed ceilings and panelled walls were known to the antiquarian.

The grounds, with their tangled masses of shade, were beautiful with a strange, weird beauty; disorder and decay were veiled by the tender touches of a soft-

hearted Nature, fain to shield such ravages; and dusky roofing of heavy shadows screened from the garish light of day every wrinkle and hollow, making the universal old age a thing to be worshipped and revered, instead of mocked or scoffed at.

It may have been owing to some such feeling that its present possessor had not touched stick nor stone for a quarter of a century—ever since he had come into possession, in fact. He had been then a man of fifty, and he had known Cullingdon from the day of his birth. He had never known it different from what it was now, he vowed. Why should he begin to do what had never been done before, he wished to know? Who was he that he should amend the ways of his forefathers? If they had chosen to leave tottering walls and rampart overgrowth alone, he had as good a right as they, to do so likewise. One thing he knew—with an oath—he knew that no penny of his should ever go to pulling about the old place. It should fall down about his ears first. No, by Jove, he liked it as it was; and he had a right to like it as it was. It was nobody's business but his own and Harry's after him; and Harry could do as he pleased when his time came, &c., &c., &c.

All of which the simple speaker thought went down with his neighbors, and stopped their mouths.

They only loughed at him behind his back. They knew all about it; knew that the poor old man was simply pining to pour forth upon his starving acres the golden shower which should make them break forth into bud and blossom again; that he could scarce bear to look up at the half-ruined tiles, wondering how long they would hold out, without repairing and restoring; that, few as were the retainers in office, the wages of his very gardeners and laborers were ever in arrears; that, in short, the old couple lived from hand to mouth, and scarcely knew which way to turn, in order to keep body and soul together.

This must be read with an understanding mind, be it understood.

We do not mean for a moment to insinuate that Sir Arthur Dorrien had given up his club subscription in town, or that he and Lady Dorrien did not run up to

one of the best hotels for some weeks during every London season, or that their son was not in a crack regiment, or, in a word, that they denied themselves any of the absolute necessities of life; they only cut off all extravagant subscriptions and benevolent schemes, had unfortunate attacks of illness whenever they would have liked to show hospitality, did not care for riding and driving, were too old for balls, and recommended Mr. Dorrien, their only son and heir, to be exceedingly careful as to whom he paid attentions, since so much depended on that particular point in his career.

If Harry could only marry money, even Cullingdon Manor was not past holding up its head again.

But my readers will naturally inquire, what was Daisy Schofield that she should aspire to be the choice—you have all divined she was the choice—of the proud, spendthrift Dorriens? How was she, only one of six or seven, to build up the fortunes of the impoverished house, and reinstate it in the rank it had once held? Aha! Sir Arthur knew what he was about, whatever you may suppose. He had discovered a little matter that was not generally given out; and that, indeed, was not thought much of in a family where all were well endowed, and where a few thousands more or less made but little difference. Daisy had seventy-five thousand pounds of her own. Seventy-five thousand down on her twenty-first birthday she would have, and everybody knows that seventy-five thousand down is a very different matter to seventy-five, or many times seventy-five, in goodness knows how many years to come.

This sum of ready money Daisy had inherited from her maternal grandfather, Mrs. George Schofield's papa, who had made up his mind to leave it to his first grandchild; and that grandchild proving a daughter, had not altered his determination.

A positive old man who held it to be a virtue not to budge from his word once announced, he had died without ever having evinced the slightest irresolution on the point; and he had furthermore come to an understanding with the little girl's parents that this legacy should in no wise be considered as Daisy's portion, but should be taken as a free gift from himself, her father

engaging that her share of his own wealth should be neither more nor less than that of any of her brothers and sisters.

Mr. George Schofield, well pleased, had laughed and promised. He had enough for all, he had said, but if his father-in-law chose to make an heiress of little Daisy, why, of course, he was at perfect liberty to do so, and on the old gentleman's demise there had been so little interest felt in the matter by the junior members of the family, that no one had ever taken the trouble to inform their new-found connections on the subject. Even Mrs. George Schofield had ceased to remember that Daisy was in any way different from the rest. With her they were all so goodlooking and so clever, and so much thought of, and such fine young people in every way, that she would declare she never seemed to feel that she knew which was first or last.

At the period at which our story opens, Daisy was within a few months of being twenty-one years of age; and this fact had been of vast importance in the eyes of someone else, if her own people thought little of it, that someone being old Sir Arthur Dorrien.

"My dear creature, what would you have!" he cried, in confab with a dutiful and obedient spouse. "Of course you would have preferred one of the Lavenham girls. So should I. There is good blood on one side there, at all events. But of what use is it to think of them? Rich uncle? Pshaw! I have known Joseph Schofield by sight these thirty years, and he has scarcely turned a hair. He is good for another thirty. Add to which, there is nothing secure in that quarter. I tell you, nothing. Lavenham let out as much to me. Naturally Lavenham hopes for the best. So do I. Nice girls, and deuced handsome girls, he tells me. We had better keep them out of Harry's way, till after this affair is settled. But Harry can take care of himself. He is as cool a beggar as I know. It is a perfect god-send—I can hardly believe it even now—his taking to this little Schofield girl. It will be the making of him. It will be the making of us all. If we could only have her over here—but I am afraid to have her here, and that is the truth. Simpson has been at me again for

money, and I haven't sixpence forthcoming. He says the lodge gates are giving way. Let them give way, say I. Perhaps we'll have the lodge gates put in repair by this time next year, Mr. Simpson, I thought in my heart; for Harry has promised me one thing, he will lay out a few thousands on the old place directly he has them to lay, and I know how to work it so that he shall keep his word. The brother, that young George Schofield, who, I am told, looks after the business, he shall stipulate with Harry to put the manor in order, and I'll give him the hint how much should be spent upon it. I must choose my own time. If he were to see us now he might take fright and warn off the girl; we must have her fast before we show her the old den; and that is why I should wait a little before having the Lavenham cousins over here, either. First-rate idea, Lavenham's sending those girls down to this neighborhood. When we give out the match, we'll call our bride one of the Lavenham family, a connection of the Lavenham family, and take care that the cousins are bridesmaids," and he rubbed his thin old hands with a wrinkled chuckle. "You and I may end our days in luxury, my lady," he ran on. "And when we make our bow, our son and daughter will reign at Cullingdon Manor as our fathers have reigned before us. The girl will have her hundred thousand, if she has a penny, most likely more, a good deal more, but, anyhow, a hundred thousand will keep the old place going. But quiet, mums the word at the present moment, Lady Dorrien. Harry must not seem too eager. We must not any of us seem too eager. Those Lavenhams have noses like bloodhounds, if they take after the rest of the breed; and if they raised the alarm, we might have the whole chase for nothing. So softly—softly—*che va piano, va lontano*, hey, my lady? That's not only good Italian, but good sound common sense for you," and the old fellow trotted off to look once more at his owl-haunted turrets, his empty orchards and stagnant ponds, and consider how best they might be restored to their pristine glory and prosperity under the good time that was now, he devoutly trusted, coming.

His son Harry was now at home. Up to within the

last few days Harry had been enjoying his last bachelor season among his bachelor friends, and we need not perhaps add that, when a man feels it incumbent on him to do as much, he usually contrives to do it pretty thoroughly. Harry's father called him a cool beggar. The old gentleman never interfered with his son, never reasoned with him, nor restricted him, nor made demands upon him. He seldom even inquired how Mr. Dorrien spent his time. Mr. Dorrien did not like inquiries, he was aware. He had not liked them himself when he was a young fellow, and even as an old fellow considered them superfluous. Time went fast enough; it went somehow; what mattered it how? Mr. Dorrien was of the same opinion; and accordingly the two got along with all outward decency, and maintained their several positions without disturbance. That neither had the slightest faith in nor love for the other, that neither cared, except in an infinitesimal degree, for the other's presence, that neither sought to brighten the other's life, nor would, as a personal loss, have mourned the other's death, in no wise affected the case.

They considered themselves patterns, as fathers and sons went. Lady Dorrien believed that Sir Arthur and Harry were very good friends. They were never loud nor quarrelsome in their talk. They went to county meetings together, and she knew that occasionally they dined at each other's clubs in town.

And now Harry had told his father about Daisy Schofield. To tell the truth Sir Arthur had been immensely surprised and hugely flattered by the confidence. "By George, he told me himself, my lady! I tell you he did. Told me all about it! Asked my—my—not my help, confound it! I have no help to give,—but my—our approval—our sanction, that's the word. And I said 'God bless you, Harry, my boy; go in and win.' That's what I said, for I don't mind owning it; and I haven't been better pleased since the bells were set ringing at his own birth. 'Go for her,' I said; 'your mother and I will make her welcome.' We'll put up with the infernal mercantile connection—no, no, I didn't say that to him, trust me—no, no; I only said, 'We'll do the civil by the family of course, Harry; and your

mother will call.' But he thought it better you shouldn't call. He does not care to have the hue and cry raised; he knows what he's about. Softly, my lady—softly,—*che va piano, va lontano*—he! he! he!"

Harry, however, meant to push the siege himself; he had, it is true, drunk his fill of bachelorhood during those warm July days and nights, which in his eyes represented his last month of grace, and had not endured to leave that festal period behind until the very latest moment, that moment when an electric thrill seems to shoot through all the pulses of the metropolis, scattering its denizens far and wide in the twinkling of an eye.

But that period arrived, he too had been off like the wind. He had dashed down to Cullingdon and ridden over to the Grange the following day. He had discovered that his parents had done as they were bid. They had kept quiet. They had let the Schofields and the Lavenhams alone; (he had heard about the Lavenhams, and his verdict had been, "Let them alone, too"), and he had returned in the evening after his first visit to the Grange very well pleased with everything, and with himself most of all.

Yes, Daisy was a dear little creature, pretty and presentable; just the thing for him in every way. He had done a clever thing in finding her out; and now that he had begun, he should go on with the affair straightway.

He sang a tune as he rode home through the lanes. He had a loud, sweet voice; and the laborers peeped over the hedgerows, to see who the jolly songster might be. He knocked down waving branches of honeysuckle, and stuck them in his buttonhole. He felt in a frolicsome, effervescent mood. Mrs. Schofield had wanted him to stay for dinner—she always wanted everybody to stay for dinner—but he had thought he could hardly do that. He had asked a friend down. He would come another day, if she would let him. He hoped she would let him come another day; come often; it was so nice, and pleasant, and lively at the Grange; and at Cullingdon it was so terribly dull. His parents were old, quite old; never went anywhere;

kept no company; he had come down to look after them a little, so he must not be too much away—but still he would come as often as ever he could to the Grange, she might be sure of that—and then he had sighed, sighed and smiled boldly in the widow's face, and had seized her plump, outstretched hand, grasped it warmly, and gone home laughing and singing.

"I declare he is handsomer than ever!" mama had cried, looking after him. "Well, I am glad to think he likes to come to us. But really I think all the nice young men do like to come to us. And I am sure if he is dull at home, we ought to ask him to meet some of them."

But Daisy had known better. "You stupid mama!" She had made a face which had some humor and a world of pertness in it. "As if he wanted other men! As if he could not get plenty of men for himself, if it were men he wanted! It is us, he comes to see—us." And then she too had begun to sing.

The next day and the next had brought Dorrien; and on the third Daisy had mentioned him to Isabel Lavenham, and had told her, moreover, that they were expecting Mr. Harry Dorrien that very afternoon or evening—in consequence of which communication it was on the following day that the little scene took place between the sisters which has been already narrated.

"Shall we ride round by the Grange this evening, Uncle Schofield?"

It had been a sultry, burning day, and the accommodating uncle had been induced to dine early, to dine directly he came home, and order the horses for seven o'clock. A great revolution had taken place in his bachelor household since it had come under petticoat dominion, and as for sitting over his wine in solitary state during the coolest and pleasantest part of the day as he had been wont to do, it was not now to be thought of. He should be allowed to resume the habit presently, he was assured in Bell's liquid accents; they would not be too cruel to him; would not make him turn out as soon as the summer evenings began to shorten, and the chills of autumn to creep over the land at nightfall.

But just at present, just during these hot, hot days, when they could not possibly go abroad under the fiery glare of the sun—he had stopped the appeal by a pat on the shoulder and by telling the speaker that she was the most sensible girl he knew.

Furthermore, he had intimated that before that period of autumn chills which she forecast they should have a treat. He would take a holiday, say in September—he did not think he could get away before September, but September was an excellent time for Scarborough—and to Scarborough in September they should go. They had thanked him charmingly, as they always did thank him; he had thought he read pleasure and gratitude beaming in their eyes; and how was he to guess that, in the sanctity of their own chamber afterwards, they had asked each other the swift, pertinent question: "Will it be *too* vulgar? *Too* dreadful? Can we let him go or not?"

They had decided that at any rate the idea need not be negatived for the present, and they had wits enough, poor things, to see that to the present only must they now confine themselves.

We are digressing, however. Our object is merely to show that uncle and nieces were now upon the best of terms; and that, although the triumphant expectations of the former and the worst auguries of the latter had been alike fulfilled, there yet remained an understanding so excellent between the three, that perhaps Bell and Monica were really happier than they knew, and certainly Joseph Schofield was happier than he had ever been in his life.

How very happy may a man be who is properly managed! There is really no need to handle him coarsely, and spoil his mouth by tugging at the bit. He ought never to be driven on the curb. He requires but the lightest touch, the merest hint, and he will caper and frisk, and prance and fondle, and be as merry as the day is long, and go exactly the way he is meant to go, when the proper sort of fingers hold the reins.

It was quite a pretty sight to see old Joseph out with his beauties. He would manœuvre in his artless, transparent way to show them off at this house and

that, on their country rounds. He would contrive to return home through the more populous villages, and saunter down the streets; to pull up and call over the walls to the people he knew; and canter under the windows of houses whose occupants were out upon the terrace or the lawn.

Monica and Bell knew very well what he was about. Perhaps in their secret hearts they did not altogether despise the homage thus brought to their feet. To each other they laughed at it, and suffered it. It amused their uncle, and their uncle had to be amused. As he had bestowed on them their horses, he had an undoubted right to exhibit them on horseback. Their uncle Lavenham had exhibited them without any such right; and this reflection, we may here remark, was only one of many which were forever stealing into their bosoms at unsuspected moments. They were taken at unawares by them.

But all the same it seemed natural and proper that they should dictate and be obeyed in the new life.

Isabel Lavenham knew perfectly well that if there were one place on earth to which Mr. Joseph Schofield did not willingly wend his way on a summer evening, it was to the cousinly domain yclept the Grange. He had the peculiar shrinking aversion of a quiet man towards a voluble, demanding woman. If Mrs. Schofield would have been content herself to talk, and to permit him to be silent, he might have endured her; but it was that excellent woman's way to force an acquiescence or a congratulation by the sheer dint of her persistency; and on the one theme in which she excelled he was willing to have allowed both to be taken for granted. He had not a word to say against the young people, but he did wish he were not required to say so many words for them.

All of this had been early apparent to the quick-witted Monica, and passed on by her to Bell. "He sees they are insignificant and uninteresting as plainly as ever we do," and she laughed and nodded. "He is pretty bright, this uncle of ours. His face is a treat beneath Mama Schofield's yarns; and when he has to look at photographs, to compare one photograph with another,

to say if Daisy has not a look of Tottie, and if Tottie has not the eyes of Minnie, and Minnie the chin of Tottie—and then if George is not done great injustice to, because George should have been done in profile, George having such a handsome profile," ("George's little snub nose, you know," in parenthesis)—"oh, the whole is a treat! I am never tired of beholding that treat."

It is to be presumed that Bell also enjoyed the treat; but on the present occasion she had another motive for going to the Grange; and to the Grange accordingly, regardless of the faint shade which anticipation threw over Mr. Schofield's brow, she proposed to repair.

"To the Grange, my dear? Ye-es—my dear; to be sure, yes; if you and Monica wish it," replied he, somewhat ruefully. "By all means let us go to the Grange, if you like. What say you, Monica?" catching at a straw. "All places are alike to me, you know. I go for the ride, not for the—ahem! The Grange then, if you wish it," he concluded, hastily.

To please her sister Monica did wish it. She would do Bell a kindness whenever it could be done; and she knew that the little curiosity, and the little anxiety, and the little fret altogether about those tiresome people, those neglectful Dorriens, who had now come to fill so large a space upon their limited horizon, would be soothed and humored, if not entirely put to rest, should any sort of explanation or apology for their behavior be forthcoming through the medium of Daisy Schofield.

For herself, Monica had begun to feel an antagonistic spirit rise within at the bare mention of the Dorrien's name. In her eyes they represented the attitude of her old world towards herself and Isabel at the present moment; she had, it is true, previously divined what that attitude might be, but she did not any the more love those who were now thus confirming her prophetic wisdom.

Still, wisdom or no wisdom, to go to the Grange could do no harm; and since Bell wished it—and the horse's heads were turned that way.

"I wonder if we shall find any new photographs about," observed Monica, slyly, the point being settled and no retreat possible. "Just supposing you have a

whole set of new photographs to go through, Uncle Schofield!"

"Dear me. I hope not, my dear," obviously alarmed.

"Tottie is sure to have had some new ones taken," proceeded the tormenting creature. "She has not been photographed for nearly a fortnight. Tottie is the belle of the family, we all know; she is 'a real, beautiful girl,' according to her mother. 'And so tall, too! But, however,'" mimicking, "'but, however, Minnie is growing too, and no mistake.' They will be as tall as Bell and I are, Mrs. Schofield thinks. As for Daisy——" she stopped.

"And what do you think about Daisy?" said her uncle, quietly.

"Oh, we don't think about her at all!" rejoined Miss Monica, with a flick of her pretty riding-whip. The truth was she had a superb contempt for Daisy Schofield.

CHAPTER VII.

A CHANCE ENCOUNTER.

Man's life is all a mist, and in the dark
Our fortunes meet us.—DRYDEN.

THE party had nearly reached their destination when another horseman, who had up to the last moment been hidden by hedges, suddenly emerged from a grass lane intersecting the main road; and as he drew rein, and politely checked himself in order to allow them to pass, they had a full view of a handsome face and figure, and, in particular, of a pair of curious eyes which unhesitatingly scanned all three, with an air of surprise that could bear but one interpretation.

"He is saying to himself, Who the deuce can those be?" murmured Monica to her sister, as soon as sufficient distance permitted the aside, "and we are saying to

ourselves, Who the deuce can he be? Bell, can that be the Dorrien boy, do you think?"

"That was Sir Arthur Dorrien's son," observed her uncle, overhearing the last words. "You mean that gentleman behind us now? That was Mr. Dorrien. He does not often come down to these parts. But I heard to-day that he was at Cullingdon. The old folks are growing feeble, I fancy; and he may be a more dutiful son than people say. For Cullingdon is a dreary spot, and there is never anything going on there. Sir Arthur looked very tottery the last time I saw him."

"I did not know you knew them, uncle Schofield."

"Neither I do. But I know them by sight. No, indeed, I don't know them. The Dorriens know nobody hereabouts—nobody, at least, that I do; they used to give great parties to the aristocracy and have all sorts of goings on, drinking and dicing——"

"Ah!" His auditors pricked up their ears.

"Aye, indeed—in Sir Arthur's young days——"

"Oh!—oh-h! Only in Sir Arthur's young days." A perceptible fall in their accents.

"And now I gather that the family are looked a bit shy upon."

"Are they?"

"A wild, spendthrift set. The last baronet, the one who built the racing stables, ran through the money like water. It had been scraped together by his predecessor and had amounted to a very decent income when he came in for it—though a good deal of the land had gone, and could never be got back; but, however, there was still a fair entailed estate, and with a little care it might have been improved into a really valuable one. Then what must Sir Luke do—that was the last man—but send it flying. It was always either scrape or spend with them. Then, having pauperized the next heir, there would be a match made up with some heiress—but they never managed to get hold of the great heiresses somehow, I fancy they were too much blown upon,—and there would be inching and pinching to cut a dash and entertain the nobility up in London, while everything was going to rack and ruin at home. When Sir Arthur came into the property it was just about at its worst.

He has done his best, poor body, to keep up appearances,—at least after his marriage and settling down; he was a wild enough scamp before that; but he had been married and sobered years before he came in for the title, and since then he has been of the scraping sort. He is as poor as Job however; he has scarcely a sixpence to bless himself with, and all the scraping in the world won't set him on his feet. The son—yon behind us," continued Mr. Schofield, his broad, north-country dialect coming out markedly when he was led to be communicative and discursive, as on the present occasion, "yon's his only son. He is an idle fellow, I'm told. That's his father's look-out. He should have set him to work when he was younger. But no Dorrien ever did a stroke of honest work in his life, and Sir Arthur is not the man to begin. People say there is only one thing left for the son to do, and that is to marry money. He is a good-looking fellow; he ought not to have much difficulty."

Meantime the good-looking fellow trotted along behind.

"Is he coming in here?" inquired Isabel of her sister, in an undertone, as a turn in the drive which they had entered during the above dissertation, disclosed the figures of horse and rider at the gate. "Monica, what luck!"

Mr. Dorrien turned his horse's head and rode slowly in.

"Isn't it luck?" repeated Bell in her sister's ear. "We shall know all about it now: why, they have never been near us, and if they ever mean to come, and all. And he will see us, and can tell his parents about us."

"Dear me! I believe he is coming up to the house!" exclaimed her uncle, almost as she had done, he having not looked around before. "That's a queer thing. What can be the meaning of that? Can he have mistaken the house, I wonder? Or—but no, I don't think they can know him."

"I have heard Daisy speak of him," quoth Isabel, demurely. "I think they do know him, uncle."

Mr. Schofield dismounted and rang the bell.

"Aye, he is coming here," he repeated, eying the

approaching stranger from the doorstep. "Sure enough, he is coming. He is keeping his horse at a walk to let us be out of the way. Well, we shall be out of the way directly. Are you going in? Or, will you sit still in your saddles, while I send for the girls! Or,—what shall we do?" Mr. Dorrien was drawing nearer, and he felt slightly fluttered.

"Go in, certainly," replied Isabel, with delightful promptness. "Help me down, uncle, please. Oh, I think we must certainly go in!" and she sprang lightly to the ground, and ran up the steps, poising her shapely figure for a moment on the topmost, to take another glance at the interesting person in the back-ground. Then "Come, Monica," as Monica was down and up likewise; "come and find Mrs. Schofield;" and in ran the two, leaving their unfortunate elderly escort to the mercy of—somebody who was at his elbow the next half minute.

"Mr. Schofield, I am sure," exclaimed a frank voice, whose perfect ease contrasted ludicrously even to Mr. Joseph Schofield's own perception, with the obvious discomfort of the feelings it excited within his breast. "Let me hold one of your horses, may I? Three are too many; and they are always rather long in bringing round a man at this house."

"Thank you. Oh, I—I can manage. They'll stand quiet enough. Thank you—thank you," nervously.

"Pretty creatures they are. What a capital match those two are! It is a treat to see good horses anywhere in this neighborhood. Pray do not look at mine," with a frank laugh.

"Oh, dear me, I am sure—yes, I chose them myself. I—I fancied getting them a match." For the life of him Mr. Schofield could not overcome a certain breathlessness and tremor. We have said that he was not a shy man, that among his own friends and associates he could be sociable and easy; he had almost at once surmounted the awkwardness of meeting two elegant young London beauties, and had been able to assume towards them the proper air of a relation and a host,—but the long-standing, deeply-rooted awe of the Dorrien blood which had been born in him, bred in him, nur-

tured and fostered in him by every association and tradition, was not to be eradicated without a struggle.

All his life he had seen Sir Arthur get in and out of railway carriages, and had never dared to enter the same compartment. He had encountered him on the pavement, or on the road, and had stepped aside. To read in the papers that Sir Arthur and Lady Dorrien had arrived at or had departed from Cullingdon had been always a matter of profound interest. Their names figuring at any county festivities had been duly noted. Even to see their coach pass, or their liveried servants ride by, had been something.

All of which you will understand of course, dear reader, was perfectly compatible with Mr. Schofield's calling the family a wild, spendthrift set, and being sure that the present baronet had scarce a sixpence wherewith to bless himself. Your self-made man scorns and scoffs at old escutcheons in tatters ; he sees nothing fine in having a handle to a name that is frayed at both edges—but he steps off the pavement all the same. He feels a tingle in his cheek when he is politely accosted by the brisk tones of the unconscious Sir Launcelot, or Sir Giles. He wonders if he says the proper thing? He wonders if he should take off his hat, or not. He is eager to be agreeable ; still more anxious to be correct. Hopes he is not making a bad impression. Hopes —devoutly hopes—that someone has seen the honor done him ; finally goes away with a glow at his heart. The next time the ruined grandees are referred to in his presence he is singularly mild, and merely observes that they have been unfortunate, and that it is a sad pity to see so fine a family going to the dogs.

Mr. Schofield, who had been by no means behindhand with his very plain opinion while Harry Dorrien was out of earshot, trotting behind, experienced a meekness and uneasiness when brought face to face with the friendly young horseman, which was inexplicable from any other cause than that above suggested. He did not cringe, but his soul was troubled. He thought he ought not to have been so basely deserted. He looked about piteously for aid. The sound of footsteps hurrying round the corner of the house, and the emergence

of a groom from the laurel bushes gave him a sense of relief, which was intensified by the disappearance of the young man in company with the groom, and the "Kindly tell Mrs. Schofield I shall be in directly," with which he was charged. Evidently Mr. Dorrien knew Mrs. Schofield; evidently he was at home about the place. He had gone off leading his own horse, and Monica's.

"Here he comes—and leading Brown Eyes." It was Monica's amused voice which announced the discovery. She had found Daisy alone in the shrubbery, the drawing-room being empty, and was proceeding with her in search of the others—Isabel having voted the lawn a more likely spot—when the two came face to face with the stable party.

Monica was looking her best, her brilliant best. Harry Dorrien glanced at her, and turned on his heel. "I say, send some-one to take these horses, will you?" he called after the groom in front, and turned again and stood still. Daisy shook hands and presented him.

"My father and mother have been greatly disappointed that they have been unable to call upon you before, Miss Lavenham," said Mr. Dorrien. "My mother has been unwell, and my father particularly busy."

Miss Lavenham replied suitably. Now she was glad to have come. The Dorriens had not then meant to slight her and Isabel.

"It is a long way, of course," proceeded the new comer, (he was by no means so young as she had supposed, was another discovery), "but it would be nothing if my mother were stronger. She is getting old now, and can't stand much, that's the fact. However, I—I know she means to make the effort."

"Pray beg her not. If she would allow us to go over and see her, my sister and I should be so glad. Colonel Lavenham told us that Sir Arthur was good enough to say something about it, but we knew Lady Dorrien was delicate," (fie, Monica!), "and that she would very likely be unable to drive so far. We really did not expect her," (fie, fie!). "Do you think she would allow us to ride over to Cullingdon instead?"

"She would be immensely pleased if you would."

The two were on in front, Monica on the path, Dorrien on the narrow grass edge by her side, dodging the rose-trees, and keeping step, in spite of every obstacle. Perforce, neglected Daisy had to follow alone.

"May I come over and show you the way?" suggested he next.

"Oh, I daresay, we should find the way easily, thank you. My uncle has shown us Cullingdon already. We ride with him at present," replied Miss Lavenham, with a quiet little note that conveyed its own rebuff. "And our groom also knows the way, if my uncle should be unable to spare the time," she added.

"Awfully glad if he could though, of course. My father hardly ever sees anyone. We don't know what to do with ourselves down here. That is why Mrs. Schofield is so good in letting me come over to her house," with a sudden impression of a blank countenance in the background. "Your mother is charitable to me, is she not?" addressing Daisy with a certain familiarity of accent which was not lost upon Daisy's cousin. "I go nowhere else—just about here. I don't know another soul for miles round. I often wonder who lives in all the houses, and what sort they are."

"We live in one," said Monica, in rather a low voice. "And we know the people who live in the others. Mr. Dorrien, my sister and I have had a kind home made for us by our mother's only brother, and——"

"I made Mr. Schofield's acquaintance at the house just now. I was so glad to do it, for I had known him by sight all my life. But these Liverpool swells are such big men, that they won't know us poor——" then he caught Monica's eye, and stopped in confusion. He saw that she not only understood, but half sympathized with, and then revolted from his irony. He perceived that he was not addressing a simple girl brought up among her own people, but a woman of the world, young in years it is true, but not ignorant of that lore in which he and his were steeped; and instantly he was on guard.

"Miss Schofield, if your mother is in the drawing-room, do you think she would give me a cup of tea?"

"Certainly," said Daisy, rather astonished as he stood

back to let her pass. Why should she pass? Why should they not all three go in together, as would have seemed the natural mode of procedure? But Mr. Dorrien's air said "Precede us, if you please," and accordingly she led the way as they emerged from the shrubbery.

Dorrien stopped, and bent his head to inhale the fragrance of a rose-tree hard by. "Miss Lavenham," he murmured. Monica looked round. He was standing still; so she had also to stand still. "I did not mean to express one syllable of contempt towards your uncle. I—we Dorriens are bitterly jealous and envious of these rich men, as you can guess; and when you checked me just now——"

"I beg your pardon," said Monica haughtily.

"You did, by your glance. You meant to say you would not permit a word against your family."

"I did—I do mean it."

"Will you not believe me? I am so far from wishing to undervalue it, or any single member of it, that I—I—I——" (inwardly—"Shall I say that I hope to enter it?" A voice within thundered "*No.*" He stopped almost aghast at the "*No.*" It had echoed through every fibre of his being.)

"We need not discuss the point," said Miss Lavenham, with a heightened color. "Until now, as perhaps you know, until a month ago, neither my sister nor I knew anything of our Liverpool relations. We had supposed our home was to be always with Colonel and Mrs. Lavenham. But on the change in their plans, we were sent" (she set her teeth) "here. They sent us, do you understand? We had no option but to come. But since we *have* come, we have met with such kindness as we could not have dreamed of, could not have believed in. Mr. Schofield is never tired of thinking of new things to please us; and we give him trouble; we put him out of his way; we alter his arrangements," (on a sudden she recognized all this that had been vaguely present to her view heretofore), "and he neither looks upon us as burdens, nor as encumbrances. He is the best, the kindest—I cannot bear to hear him——" Her voice was full, she broke off short.

—"By Heaven! you shall never hear him spoken one word against by me! Anyone who is kind to *you* ——" His voice was almost in her ear, his eyes were saying all manner of things.

"And here is Mr. Dorrien at last! And Monica, too, I declare. Well, I thought we should never find you. Well, I told Isabel that I would come this way, and she might go that way. You took the wrong path. You should have turned off at that corner, for the house. Where's your uncle, Monica?"

Nobody seemed to know where Mr. Schofield was. Everybody had been at cross purposes, it seemed, and everybody seemed more or less disturbed thereby. Monica alone said nothing. There was a bright flush on her cheek. Presently she sat down on the terrace, asking not to enter the warm, crowded drawing-room; and Mr. Dorrien brought her her tea, and lingered longer than he need have done over the little service. His cheek was flushed also, and he was rather hurried and incoherent as he laughed and jested with Daisy subsequently, when he would pour out the hot water from the urn, and poured it all into the tray, and insisted on collecting the cups, even from the party on the terrace —though she assured him the servants would attend to that afterwards—and finally found the room so hot, so dreadfully, steamily hot, and overpowering, that he asked if she would not like to leave her duties and come outside into a purer atmosphere?

She went, of course.

Mr. Dorrien was very attentive after that. He lay on the grass in front of the group, and talked to Daisy, inquiring after her successes in this contest and that—the croquet-match, the water-color competition, the village flower-show. He presumed that Miss Schofield liked these sort of inquiries, and that style of conversation. Mrs. Schofield beamed benignly by, and the younger ones ran in and out, and tripped each other up, without let or hindrance from her.

As for Monica, she found the evening pleasant. It was all folly of course. It was perfectly absurd her disliking to talk it over with Isabel, and declining to know anything about Mr. Dorrien when interrogated

by her uncle. Mr. Schofield thought all had gone off to admiration, and was unfeignedly rejoiced at the prospect of an entrance to Cullingdon Manor having been effected for his nieces in so easy a manner. If he had known before that Colonel Lavenham had any acquaintance with Sir Arthur—but anyway, he could hardly have tackled Sir Arthur; and the young ladies could not certainly have tackled Lady Dorrien until her ladyship had given some sign. Had they not expected her to call?

They owned they had.

But she had not done so?

No.

Ah, well, Mr. Schofield could fancy he understood the why and the wherefore of that. It was because they had come to live under his roof. The Dorriens had always held themselves aloof from the mercantile community; but here both Monica and Isabel raised their protest. It was not that at all. Mr. Dorrien had assured them it was not so. Mr. Dorrien—then Monica's voice died away, and Isabel alone proceeded fluently. Mr. Dorrien had made it all right. His mother had been most anxious to drive over, but she been unwell; the heat of the past month had tried her much, and her doctor had forbidden exertion of any kind. She had not ventured on the long drive. Her spokesman had vouched for her, and he had had it all out with Isabel, who had been much more amenable on the subject than had her prouder and quicker sister. Although by no means a fool, she had naturally believed what she wished to believe, and the young man, we may just add, had been rather more careful in his expressions when discussing the matter for the second than for the first time. He had taken his cue, and would not offend again.

In consequence, Bell had found him delightful. Quite their own sort, as she subsequently averred. He knew the Bathursts and the Frenches, and some of the Alverstokes, cousins of their Alverstokes, and numbers of other people, all their own sort of people, and had wondered how he had never met themselves; though to be sure he had been abroad all the former summer, and had only gone up this year in time for the last six weeks of

the season, at the beginning of July, he said; which must have been about the very time they had left:—and so on, and so on. Isabel wondered a little why Monica was not more interested, did not wake up more to the subject. She had hardly spoken during all the ride home. What was it? Was Monica tired? Or cross? Or was there anything——? And here the speaker stopped short, wondering like a puzzled child whether there were anything she had done which she ought not to have done, as to which her Mentor were now nursing wrath in store. No; Monica smiled, and then laughed outright at the supposition. She was in spirits to laugh? Then all was right.

But was it not odd—odd, and curious, and a neat thing altogether? Catching the young man they wanted at the very right moment! Now, they could go over to Cullingdon. Now Lady Dorrien would see them, and perhaps take a fancy to them, and ask them to her balls. What? Did she never give balls? Oh dear, how stupid! Did she give dinner parties, shooting parties? Monica did not know. Well, at any rate they should soon find out; and Mr. Dorrien's last words had been that his mother would expect them, and that he would look out for them.

And still Monica only went on smilingly putting off her clothes; and still she scarcely seemed to notice her sister's babble.

CHAPTER VIII.

SIR ARTHUR DORRIEN'S WISDOM.

> What can ennoble fools, or sots, or cowards?
> Alas! not all the blood of all the Howards.—POPE.

"AND so you fell in with the Lavenham girls? And they were over visiting the Schofield girls? Over for the evening? Quite in a friendly, cousinly way, all one family, running in and out, hey?" Sir Arther Dorrien was the speaker, and his tone betokened high good

humor. He was almost always in good humor at this period. "Well, well, Lavenhams or Schofields, I fancy it does not much matter, Harry, my boy. Deuced good family the Lavenhams, and if *they* could intermarry with the Schofields, eh? We must have those Lavenham girls over here; I gave my word to their uncle I should; and your mother must call."

"What do you say to calling this afternoon, ma'am?" Mr. Dorrien turned to her, for the trio were assembled in her morning room, and it was the day after the events narrated in the last chapter. "I as good as said you would. In fact I would have said anything, I felt so uncommonly awkward. Evidently you had been expected before now."

"And if we are to make any way with the Schofields," proceeded Sir Arthur, rubbing his pale hands together, and looking delighted significance, "we must not neglect the collateral branches. Always secure your outposts, Harry, before you advance upon the citadel. Uncle Joe and his pair of thoroughbreds must be secured."

"Dear me, what am I to do?" demanded Lady Dorrien, feebly. "What does Harry say they had expected me to do? You talk in such riddles, Sir Arthur, that really if I am to do anything——"

"Nay, no 'ifs,' my lady. You have got to do as you are bid, Lady Dorrien," and there was a slight snap of the speaker's teeth. "No fooling at this juncture. Harry knows he can't afford fooling. Tell her what is wanted, Harry, and I'll see that she does it. Is she to drive over to uncle Joseph Schofield's to-day?"

"That's about it. To-day would be a good day."

"No time like the present, eh? But what about the other folks? How will they like the Lavenhams to have the preference? And Joseph's house is further off, besides."

"I suppose my mother must do both," conceded Mr. Dorrien, after a momentary hesitation. "As you say, sir, it wouldn't do to square the one set without the other. She must go to the Grange first," and he paused to consider; "yes, to the Grange first; they are sure to be out if she goes tolerably early."

"Don't want them to be at home, eh?"

"No."

"Tolerably frank, Harry."

"It is best to be frank, sir. I don't fancy my mother and Mrs. Schofield are likely to appreciate each other; consequently they need not meet too soon. They need never meet often. Mrs. Schofield will be far better pleased to find our cards on her hall table, than ourselves in her drawing-room.

"Oh, you are going with me?" Lady Dorrien looked relieved. "Oh, if you will go with me," she proceeded, "I shall not mind it half so much. But really you know, Harry, I never do know what to say to these sort of people, and I am so dreadfully afraid of them."

"You will not need to know what to say to Mrs. Schofield, ma'am," dryly. "She will soon inform you."

"Voluble, hey?" interposed his father, jocularly. "Well, come, that's a vast deal better than being a dummy. A dummy is the most damnable thing in creation," glancing at his wife. "When you can't get a word or an idea out of a woman, it is enough to grill your gizzard. Give me a good-humored, accommodating creature——"

"I have little doubt the widow Schofield will suit you, sir."

"Tchah! tchah! You mustn't call her 'the widow Schofield,' my boy. You must be respectful, Harry, respectful; yes, by Jove, and careful, and cautious, and all that; we must all rub up our manners, and our wits. D'ye hear that, my lady?" his intonation again becoming tinged with acrimony; "none of your airs and graces; none of your confounded *hauteur* and all that exploded trash, just now. Down on your knees to these people, if need be——,"

"If you will excuse my interrupting you, sir, I don't imagine the knee business would do the trick in this case. Our new friends will think all the more of my mother if she keeps erect, provided only she appears upon the scene at all. All she has to do——"

—"Yes, indeed, if Harry will only tell me what to do," protested the poor bewildered Lady Dorrien, whom in truth her husband had no need to browbeat, for she was, and had ever been, a mere puppet in his hands. "I

am sure I will do anything," she murmured, looking from one to the other.

"Why, of course," Sir Arthur was not to be silenced by acquiescence, which he would have stigmatized as next door to *dummyism*. "Of course. If you were not willing to do anything in this matter, you would be an out-and-out idiot. Here's your only son——,"

"Well, well, sir; my mother understands." Mr. Dorrien hated family scenes. "She will go and make herself agreeable to Mrs. Schofield and her family, if she finds them at home; and if they are out, so much the better. We will then go on to Mr. Joseph Schofield's," proceeded the young man in a brisker tone, "and I fancy we shall be obliged to put up the horses there, for an hour or so. It would be as well, don't you think? Ten miles each way in this weather—and they are not what you can call in first-rate condition, not so robust as they might be—had they not better put up, if they get the chance?"

"By all means, and have a good feed too, if they get the chance," and Sir Arthur cackled and nodded. "A few of old Joe's oats will be a dainty to which they are not accustomed, and one that will send them spinning home. I say Harry, Harry,"—as if with a sudden thought, "if—supposing, you know—if by any chance anything should turn out wrong—I mean if—it's just as well to have two strings to one's bow, eh?—hum—ha—d'ye see, Harry?"

"I don't take you, sir,—at least," ——and, with a look that instantly showed he did "take" Sir Arthur, the speaker broke off abruptly.

The old man toddled round the room, and laid his hand on his son's shoulder. "Keep in with them both," he whispered; "for God's sake, don't let the Schofield money slip through our fingers, one way or the other! What are these Lavenham girls? Wouldn't one of them do if,—eh?—supposing,—eh? But, to be sure, you know your way, my boy,—you know what you are about. And the other's money down—*money down*, by Jove! Money in prospect is all very well! and the Lavenhams are as good as ourselves any day; but old Joe is only an uncle, and he's a fool who trusts in uncles.

'Put not your trust in uncles,' eh, Harry? No, by Jove, no! But all the same, my boy, it might be as well, d'ye see? There's no harm in a reserve force. Something to fall back upon, in case of accidents! If you see your way to being friendly—friendly, and—and attentive to either of old Schofield's nieces, why—but in Heaven's name, be cautious, my dear boy! Run no risks; and make sure of your bargain, one way or the other. If you don't——" and the feeble fingers clutched the shoulder they pressed with a grip that carried its own inference.

("Confound you, the devil didn't need to send you to tempt me!" was the young man's internal response.) "All right, sir, I'll take your advice," he replied aloud. "I fancy we think pretty much alike. So now to business. Will you order the carriage, or shall I? It must come round directly after luncheon."

Directly after luncheon the mother and son set out.

Wrapped in their own thoughts, the miles along the hot, dusty lanes seemed to each to pass quickly enough; and it was with almost a start that Lady Dorrien found herself turning in at the lodge gates of the Grange.

"What a nice, fresh, well-cared-for-looking place!" exclaimed she, with instant and intuitive recognition of the contrast presented to Cullingdon. "What beautiful turf, and shrubs, and flowers! Harry, these must be rich people. Even the very gate-posts——"

Her son laughed.

"The Schofields are what you would call 'rich people' I suppose, ma'am," he said, "but it is not all this trimness and neatness which would proclaim them so, if you knew it. It is simply a matter of opinion whether you will spend your money on London houses, and travelling, and sport, and one thing and another, or on making your own place tidy. Liverpool people prefer the latter. You won't see a tumble-down cottage nor an overgrown plantation belonging to one of them. Their gardeners get enormous wages. They have all the latest inventions. Their houses are so well appointed within and without, that they make you discontented with every other house yon go to. In short, they

understand the meaning of the word 'comfort,' and act upon it."

Poor Lady Dorrien sighed. "I wish we did—I wish we *could*. But, Harry——"

"Hush! Here we are!" said he, as they stopped at the front door.

"Dear me! Already? Why, they are almost on the highroad!" cried his mother, envy vanishing. "Dear me, I should not like that!" and she looked around her in much the same manner as Miss Lavenham had looked on her first arrival at Flodden Hall. To her, as to Monica, "a mere villa" was distasteful.

The ladies were not at home; and as Mr. Dorrien gravely produced his card case, and mounted guard over his mother's till she had drawn forth the required number, no emotion of any sort could be discovered on his countenance.

The maid, a tall, spruce girl, stood still upon the steps, whilst the footman awaited further orders.

"Had we not better ask her to direct us to the other house?" murmured Lady Dorrien. "I really have no idea where it is, no more have the men. We may be wandering about for hours."

He gave her a look.

"Drive to the nearest post-office," he said to the coachman.

"It may be miles away," protested his mother.

"It is not. There is a village within half a mile, and there we can get full directions. It is far better to trust to a post-office direction than to anything a maid-servant may choose to say. Goodness knows where she might send us!"

But Sir Arthur would have guessed that another motive was at work, and Sir Arthur would have been right. Daisy Schofield's suitor did not care to proclaim upon the house-tops that he was about to call on Daisy's other relations. He had a curious sensation of being on a contraband expedition, as he found himself being swiftly borne along between the sweet-smelling hedgerows, over which waxen honeysuckles were sprawling now in unfettered luxuriance; he had a secret exultation

in his veins, a throb of expectancy and excitement in his pulses.

Daisy Schofield was to be his lot, of course; he had not the very faintest, nor the remotest intention of throwing Daisy over, of letting slip the rope which Providence had held out to save him from going to the dogs altogether, as regarded his finances. Immediate funds were absolutely indispensable not only to him as the heir, but to him as himself, since he, Dorrien, owed already four or five thousand pounds—a mere trifle of course, but a trifle which he might as well think of paying as if it had been ten times the sum, for all the prospect he had of doing so—, and only the possession of a fortune down on the nail (observe this was before the days of the Married Woman's Property Act was passed) could be of any real, immediate use. Wherefore Daisy Schofield's seventy-five thousand, which, by the way, must, he considered, now have run up at compound interest to something like eighty-five thousand—she having been a minor for over four years since the death of her grandfather—would be the making of him; while Daisy herself was a jolly little girl, who would not get to loggerheads with anybody, and who would do well enough in society, once she were detached from her present surroundings.

His plans being thus fixed and settled, it could do no manner of harm to go over and call on the cousins of his future bride. Miss Lavenham was the right sort of girl to know. Like himself she was doubtless down in these parts on business. She had her market to make; and probably had the sense to understand she must make it quickly. Of course she and her sister *might* be there to come round their rich bachelor uncle, and the rich bachelor uncle *might* be come round by them—but, and young Dorrien shook his head. Old Joseph might marry, and then, phew! away with the whole castle in the air! Old Joseph was only a man of fifty-five, he was by no means to be depended upon; nor did he imagine that Monica Lavenham on her part was the person to depend upon anyone. No, poor thing! She had been tripped up once—nay, twice; neither her own father nor her father's brother had pro-

vided for her and her sister, and the probability was that she was by this time shrewd enough to look below the surface.

"There will be a similarity between our positions which ought to be the basis of a friendship," quoth Dorrien to himself. "We shall each be so perfectly cognizant of the limited range of any flirtation between us, that we shall feel a delicious sense of safety. No fear of *me*—no fear of *her*. We shall suit each other down to the ground. That was very good advice which you proffered just now, my dear father; I shall be but filial and dutiful if I act upon it. Oh, dear me, yes; I quite 'see my way to begin friendly and attentive,' as you so prettily worded it. 'Friendly' when Daisy is by—'attentive' when she is not. Then as for the other Lavenham girl, she must be squared too; I can't have her telling tales. I——" But his reflections were cut short by finding himself turning in at the lodge gates of Flodden Hall.

"Another pretty, bright abode," murmured Lady Dorrien, afresh enamored of smooth turf, and well-swept gravel. What a blaze of flowers! What—oh, dear me! at the door already! Oh, this is really worse than the other! Why, Harry, what is the meaning of it? Why cannot these people live in decent seclusion? They seem to have taste, but——"

She was interrupted by an expression of vexation on the part of her auditor. His eye had caught sight of another equipage, whose owner was the last person he desired to find within, on the present occasion.

Bending forward, he spoke in a quick, clear, significant tone:

"I am afraid, ma'am, we shall not find the Miss Lavenhams alone. The Schofields are with them; I see their carriage standing under the trees yonder. Now, ma'am, do your best," emphatically. "Be civil to all, and, for Heaven's sake, don't show that the rencontre is unfortunate!" He had but just time to conclude ere the footman threw down the carriage steps. The young ladies were at home.

As ill luck would have it, the young ladies were very much at home, it having happened that some other

relations of Mr. Schofield's, as well as the party from the Grange, had come by appointment to five o'clock tea that very afternoon; and having now given up all idea of Lady Dorrien's calling for the present—since Monica and Isabel had alike understood that this formality was to be dispensed with, and that instead they were to ride over to Cullingdon, on receipt of an invitation of some sort—the sisters had resigned themselves cheerfully to the inevitable, and were even having some amusement out of the affair. The new Schofielders and the old Schofielders, as Monica termed them, were on the terms that different branches shooting from the same family stem very often are—namely, that of very elaborate civility and oppressive politeness, while under the mask of affection there lurked ill-concealed rivalry and dislike. Each party endeavored to seem more at home than the other upon the neutral ground on which they now met, and to know more than the other of Joseph Schofield's manner and mode of life. The one was eager to propitiate, the other to claim, the Lavenhams. Mrs. George Schofield had the pull of earlier knowledge, of having entertained the young cousins at her own house, and of being able to say "Monica" and "Isabel." On the other hand, Mrs. Palmer had known the girls' mother, had been at school with her, and could recall her as 'dear Mary." With "dear Mary" the rival matron could not cope, even though neither daughter could recollect to have ever heard any mention of a "dear Florence." Each mama had brought a daughter, and the daughters sat on opposite sides of the room; the very lap-dogs, brought in the rival equipages, would have nothing to say to one another.

Altogether it was not bad fun, for anyone in the humor for fun; and the Miss Lavenhams were, as it happened, in that humor. The Dorrien difficulty had been disposed of. Isabel's anxiety had been pacified and Monica had, as we have said, passed a pleasant evening. Each felt she could afford to smirk and chat, and keep the peace, whilst the Schofields glared on one another. Monica laughed outright when something more than usually incisive was said. Bell placidly sipped her tea,

and looked out of the window, mentally wondering where they should go for their evening ride, and how soon the invitation from Cullingdon would come? Mrs. George Schofield's warm, glossy face and Mrs. Palmer's pinched-up lips amused both the sisters; and Monica was in the act of thinking how much of the secret entertainment she had derived from the scene might be retailed to her uncle, and how much she had better affect to have let pass unobserved, when a horrified start from Isabel caused her, in common with the rest of the party, to turn her eyes towards the windows, through which at the same moment came the sound of horses' feet trampling on the gravel of the drive.

The sound ceased; but there succeeded a champing of bits and a peal at the front door-bell, while through the broad expanse of the open casement there could be distinguished by those in the bay window, among whom was Monica, a pair of horses, whose harness glittered with silver, and a cockaded coachman, whose livery could belong to none other than Sir Arthur Dorrien. The carriage was not visible, but it was not needed.

The Miss Lavenhams involuntarily exchanged glances. "Undone" was instantly perceptible on each face. Then Monica rose.

"I believe that is Lady Dorrien," she said, calmly. "If it is, will you excuse my going to sit by her near the door? She is an old lady, and—and deaf, and might be confused by so many." And she passed into the small outer recess into which the door opened.

When Lady Dorrien should be ushered in, she would thus, Miss Lavenham fondly hoped, find herself saved from half the horrors of the scene.

But Lady Dorrien had not come to be thus saved.

CHAPTER IX.

LADY DORRIEN SETS EVERYONE AT EASE.

Good manners is the art of making those
Easy with whom we converse.—SWIFT.

NOTHING indeed was further from Lady Dorrien's thoughts.

To evade aught that was disagreeable or unpalatable in the business she had in hand, was not to be thought of. She had Sir Arthur's "Down on your knees before these people" still ringing in her ears; while her son's later mandate, "For Heaven's sake, don't show that the *rencontre* is unfortunate," had been issued with a vehemence which had nearly shot her out of the carriage.

Constitutionally of a shy and nervous disposition, the seclusion in which she habitually lived, joined to the dominion of a selfish, tyrannical spouse, had by degrees scared away the few wits she might originally have possessed.

What Sir Arthur had in his mind at the present time he had, however, been at pains to make very plain to her, being fully aware that her implicit, prompt, and intelligent obedience was necessary in the matter. In matrimonial affairs the women of the family must always come to the front, be they what they may; and of this both the baronet and his son were aware. It would be no use to tell their female representative to do this and to do that—"doing" was not what was wanted. "By Jove! my lady must come down from her high horse, and be one of themselves, that's what she must," Sir Arthur had cried. He had not minced matters, caring not one whit how mean, how despicable, how sordid was the scheme laid bare. In the same breath he had sneered at the very people before whom

his wife had been bidden to cringe, while the very son, whose interests he was affecting to serve, he had avowed was to be distrusted and taken precautions against.

This was and ever had been Sir Arthur Dorrien's policy. He loved no human being but himself; his son had been to him his heir, his wife had been his slave. Since both could now serve him, he began to feel an interest in them; heretofore they had been regarded with indifference pure and simple.

On one solitary occasion had the parent's soul been stirred within his breast. His son had asked for money; the father had no money to give. Might the boy then be put in the way of seeking his own fortune? Might he learn a profession, a trade—anything? His father had bidden him go to the devil. This had happened years before; the subject had never been mooted between them since.

Eventually a commission had been given young Dorrien in a smart regiment, and he had managed by the usual methods of graceless youth to subsist and even to cut some sort of figure in it for a time; he had been tolerably lucky, and had rubbed along, according to himself. But at the period when he makes his appearance in these pages, Harry Dorrien had had enough of such a life; things had gone cross, he had been unable to keep up appearances, and had been obliged to leave his regiment, with an ugly rumor of debt hanging over him. He had not known what to do, nor which way to turn; and Sir Arthur's counsels, briefly and concisely uttered, had recurred to his memory. Matrimony was his only chance. Wealth must be obtained somehow; if not wealth, at any rate the wherewithal to pay his liabilities and keep him afloat. As for looking about to pick and choose, that was nonsense. The heiresses with whom he was acquainted were for bigger men. He must take what he could get.

And, besides, there had been no time to lose. His creditors had begun to be pressing. He had assured them vaguely, though positively, that their claims were about to be quickly settled, after the usual fashion to which the destitute of his class resort; but the

satisfaction given by such promises had not been all he could have wished.

At that precise juncture he had met Daisy Schofield, and the sky had cleared as if by magic. He had almost grown happy beneath the new state of things at Cullingdon. He and his father had absolutely become friends; he had even elicited a spark of affection from his mother. This was a great deal. Hitherto Lady Dorrien had cared only to please her husband. In her eyes Sir Arthur was not a bully, a tyrant, a base, cold-hearted mockery of a husband—he was simply a master whom it was her business to please, whose purposes it was her duty to carry out, and whose humors it was her principal effort in life to comprehend.

"She is such a fool," he would mutter to himself, if anything went awry.

But at other times the two would jog along with average serenity; and of late, since the Schofield campaign had been set afoot, Sir Arthur had been almost gracious. The thought of having a few pounds in his purse, at least in the family purse, was like dew falling on his withered flesh. In the plenitude of his satisfaction, he had refrained from gibes and jeers, except when by force of habit these would escape involuntarily, and would be heard with equanimity, so new a state of affairs arousing even her indolent ladyship to a state of feeling akin to joyfulness.

She now ascended the villa doorsteps, betwixt double rows of dropping geraniums and richly-colored bigonias, crossed the shady entrance-hall, and entered the drawing-room in which the party was assembled, conscious only of one desire, namely to bear her part as became her.

Her son followed with more mingled feelings. It was a disappointment, as well as an annoyance, to find that he must be again upon his guard. He had hoped to have found the Miss Lavenhams alone—to have had one Miss Lavenham, *the* Miss Lavenham, to himself. On the previous evening the presence of others, but more especially of the very person on earth before whom restraint was most necessary, had fettered and restricted him. He had hardly allowed himself to

do more than look at Monica, or listen when she spoke. Now and then he had replied to her; but he had scarcely ever addressed to her an opening remark.

But he had pictured a different scene on a different stage. He had imagined Lady Dorrien easily disposed of in the company of the amiable and accommodating sister—the sister who would easily perceive, if she had not already perceived, his admiration and its object—and himself left free to pass the hour where he would. An hour? He had considered that an hour would not be too long for a call, to make which such a long distance had been traversed. It would be easy to offer laughing apologies for its length: Lady Dorrien would murmur something about the horses; Miss Lavenham would rejoin with disclaimers; he would himself strike in with a new topic of conversation. It had come to this, that he had never dreamed of mishap, nor disaster; and he was accordingly chagrined almost beyond the power of concealment, on finding he had reckoned without his host, in this case converted into two hostesses.

The first sight of the circle, however, was re-assuring.

Next to a solitude *á deux*, he infinitely preferred numbers: here were six ladies, and six ladies were at all events an improvement upon four.

"I am such an invalid, my dear Miss Lavenham." It was Lady Dorrien's understood *rôle* to be an invalid on the present occasion. "My son would tell you so. I am seldom able for long drives; and the heat has been so great. Is this your sister? Your aunt did tell me we were to be neighbors, but she did not know what being neighbors in Lancashire means. I am never in this part, that is to say, I never have been until now; but I hope in the future"—with a meaning smile—"to know it better."

All went off well. Her ladyship's manner was perfection. In reality, she was no more of an invalid than any woman without an inch of elasticity, or a spark of energy, can make herself by habitual indulgence in doing nothing and going nowhere; and the heat, which was simply brilliant summer sunshine, had not prevented her taking her daily drive. *Mais que voulez-*

vous ? The good intention was apparent, and it was with the intention alone that the recipients of Lady Dorrien's diplomacy had anything to do. The pretty speech made, she sank into a corner of the sofa, whereon Mrs. George Schofield's ample form had up to the present moment reclined, and before which that worthy dame now stood, the picture of quivering uncertainty and indecision.

"Tiresome woman! not to stop where I told her," muttered Monica, who had, as we know, vainly attempted to stay Lady Dorrien's footsteps beneath the far recess. "I could have sheltered her there. Here, I can do nothing. Things must take their course."

She would not, however, assist that course. Dorrien was engaged with pretty Daisy; pretty Daisy was smiling up at him, and he was smiling down at her,—the position was perfectly understood by Miss Lavenham.

"That was not what brought Mr. Dorrien here, however," she said to herself, with a smile of another sort.

And if Mr. Dorrien wished to make his mother acquainted with Daisy's mother, he would have to perform the little ceremony himself, was the next consideration.

In a few minutes it appeared that Dorrien did so choose. Mrs. Schofield being present, and cards having been left at the Grange within the hour, he could do none otherwise than as he did. He came up to the one lady with an outstretched hand, and presented her to the other with a grace that did him credit.

Lady Dorrien bent like a graceful reed, Mrs. Schofield as gracefully as bulk and busks would permit. Each had a tea-cup in her hand, and a piece of cake between her fingers.

"I am sure,——" began Daisy's fond mamma—clang went her spoon upon the floor. "Oh, never mind—" making a lunge forward which upset the cup into her lap. "Dear me! I am sure I——Pray excuse me, Lady Dorrien,"—growing more and more confused and fluttered. "Such clumsiness! And where is my handkerchief gone?" her ample arm going round in

search of it. "Monica, dear, just lend me yours, will you? Oh, really, Mr. Dorrien, I am ashamed—" as he dutifully went down upon his knees—"to give you all this trouble! And tea is not so bad as coffee, neither. There, that will do nicely," fanning her heated cheeks with the handkerchief which had been found too late. "No, I will not have any more, thank you. Daisy here knows I never take but the one cup. Do I Daisy? It was only to keep going," in an audible whisper.

The truth was that she had been glad of any sort of occupation in the tumult of excitement caused by the new arrival, and had accepted a second supply of everything rather than have had to sit with her hands before her.

Lady Dorrien; however, with the tact of a well-bred woman, made the mischief and apology alike forgotten.

"We have just been to the Grange," she murmured sweetly; "and having been so unfortunate as to find you and your daughter out, we are doubly happy in this meeting. Harry, will you also present me to Miss Schofield?"

Miss Schofield was presented to her. I doubt if Mr. Dorrien enjoyed the ceremony. He had listened in perfect silence to the apologies of his proposed mother-in-law, and he was now equally impassive under the less obtrusive though scarcely more happy responses of his proposed bride. But he would fain have had Daisy look a little less easy, assured, and complacent. He did not know that the poor girl was at heart none of the three. She was simply endeavoring to do her best, and fell into a snare. Better instructed young ladies do not answer in short, brisk tones, when addressed by elder ones—do not affect an "I-care-for-nobody-no-not-I" sort of air, nor twirl rosebuds nonchalantly between fingers and thumb at such a moment.

"Good heavens! She must not speak like that," involuntarily reflected Lady Dorrien. But of course she looked all that was delighted and approving.

"Oh, I knew how it would be when my Daisy once

took hold," was the radiant conclusion of the other occupant of the sofa.

And thus it was the first meeting of the forces who severally desired to amalgamate, took place.

It was all very simple, as great affairs usually are. They loom gigantic in our imaginations; we rack our brains to puzzle them out, to conjecture how this and that plan of action will work, how this and that misadventure may be avoided; we reduce ourselves to misery, by apprehensions of mischance and failure; and all at once the moment is upon us, flies airily past, and waves us a gay adieu in the distance. It has gone by; and with it all terrors and alarms.

Mrs. Schofield affirmed afterwards that she had never been more at her ease, never felt more comfortable and careless, than when she was sitting at one end of cousin Joseph's big sofa, with Lady Dorrien sitting at the other. Daisy fancied Lady Dorrien looked proudly and appropriatively at them both; Lady Dorrien herself forgot that her son's eye was upon her.

And then an inspiration came to Isabel Lavenham. Though by no means possessed of Monica's powers, a society education had taught Bell something. "I must make a diversion of some kind," she told herself, and addressed forthwith the other guests the now forsaken and insignificant Palmers, who, discomfited and left out in the cold, nevertheless were stubbornly holding their ground, with the air of people who were not to be routed by any amount of contempt or neglect. "The room is too warm now that the sun is full upon it," quoth Isabel, "shall we go into the garden for a stroll?" and she stood up and looked towards the conservatory door.

"Well, I don't know; what do you say, Lizzie?" Mrs. Palmer felt that once outside that conservatory door, all chance of being able to quote Lady Dorrien, and refer to Lady Dorrien, and hurl Lady Dorrien at the heads of her less fortunate acquaintances, would be forever at an end. She had not, it was true, been formally introduced to her ladyship; but here was she sitting in the same circle with the august dame, and that was more than she had ever done before, and

45604

more than any of her set could boast of doing. In their own country the Dorriens were fenced in with an impenetrable rind from Palmers and such people.

Well, now, here she was, and here was the great lady and her son. They were all within a few feet of each other. Even if Monica and Isabel, silly creatures, did not see that it was their place to introduce their visitors to each other—visitors who were thus sitting as it were, all in one friendly group—she could do something for herself; she could insert a remark into the conversation, could address Barbara Schofield—Barbara, who was sitting up as grand as you please, and talking away as Barbara always would talk, about her sons and her daughters, her Georges and her Daisys, and the whole set of them.

What a tongue Barbara had! And what an ugly bonnet she had on! And what a big, stout, red-faced woman she did look, sitting shoulder to shoulder with that thin, peaky-nosed Lady Dorrien!

"I always did warn Barbara against growing too stout," cogitated Mrs. Palmer, with a subdued sense of consolation in the length and breadth of Mrs. Schofield's silk gown; "and Daisy will be as like her as two peas one of these days. What did you say, my dear?" —to Isabel, who, beneath the encouragement of Monica's glance, was persevering as if she had been met by a glad response, instead of a reluctant and doubtful semi-negative. "I fancy we are as cool in here as we shall be anywhere, Those nice outside blinds are a great convenience. They do keep off the sun in a wonderful way."

"But there is no sun round the corner of the house, and you would like to see the new part of the garden."

"Ah, the new part of the garden! But I fancy cousin Joseph would prefer taking us over it himself."

"Perhaps he would. We might take a turn up and down the terrace."

"Oh, I have seen the terrace scores and scores of time, my dear." Mrs. Palmer gave a little laugh. "I—there is no turnpike on that road now, Barbara," darting with sudden eagerness into the heart of the dialogue which was being carried on between the other

ladies. "You remember, Barbara," she continued, laying a firm hand upon the opportunity, "that the old turnpike was done away with over a year ago. I mean the turnpike that used to be on Sir Arthur Dorrien's grounds."

Lady Dorrien politely meant the same turnpike. It was she who had introduced it into the conversation.

"It must have been very tiresome having such an inconvenience close to your own lodge-gates," pursued Mrs. Palmer, now fairly addressing her ladyship, and glowing with internal triumph as she did so. "My poor husband used always to say that there was nothing so bad as a turnpike at one's own door."

"I am afraid the Grange is a good bit off the road, Lady Dorrien," here struck in Mrs. Schofield. ("Like her impudence!" muttered she, transfixing with wrathful eyes her now delighted and successful rival). "If you had held along the main road on your way here, you would not have had nearly so long a drive."

"But you see we were not only coming here," rejoined Lady Dorrien charmingly, "we equally desired to call at the Grange."

"Oh, I'm sure——" (That's one for Eliza!) "Oh, I'm sure! So kind, indeed! Daisy?"

But Daisy was engrossed with Dorrien.

"I dare say the country is new to you, and the lanes are very pretty just now—though there is a heap of dust," began Mrs. Palmer anew; "the dust is just awful to my mind, in this weather."

"No, indeed, we found the drive delightful," averred Lady Dorrien, with her husband's "Down on your knees to these people" dancing before her eyes. "All country roads have a little dust."

"Look at it now!" cried Mrs. Palmer.

"There's no getting in a word for her!" fumed Mrs. Schofield.

"Such a charming day!" smiled Lady Dorrien.

"Just one turn on the terrace?" pleaded Isabel Lavenham.

Monica turned away her head to laugh. "Not one of them will give in," she said to herself.

But just as she was considering that it would not do to let the fun go too far, she beheld with relief the entrance of a new-comer: her uncle Schofield stood in the doorway.

CHAPTER X.

HOW MY SOUL SICKENS IN THIS CAGE.

And round the precious metal of the bars
Flowers scarlet-hearted, and pale passion-flowers,
And crowded jasmine mingle as the stars. . . .
The bird within is mute and does not sing,
And dull his tuneless note—and clipt his wing.—RAFFALORICH.

PERHAPS there was no single person of the assembled group who did not welcome the sight of the master of the house and look for some change of scene, some fresh shuffling of the cards, on his entrance.

"I never could have believed that I should have been so rejoiced by the light of his countenance," quoth Monica, in sisterly conference presently. "There we were all at angles, and each several one of us sticking his or her angle into the other at every available opportunity! There was that poor, meek Lady Dorrien pinned down between those two vociferous women, both of them nodding at her and shouting at her, and getting their eager faces closer and closer to hers every minute! Heavens! Bell, what must she have thought of them? And there was that absurd Daisy giggling and whispering with the Dorrien boy—I rather like that Dorrien boy—and Lizzie Palmer struggling as desperately for a bit of him as her mother was struggling for a bit of his mother! And there were you, you poor Bell, ever growing fainter and fainter, and yet holding on in your tearful entreaties that *somebody* would go out upon the terrace,—(if Mrs. Palmer had been a man, she would have said, Hang the terrace! I know she would. It was written on every line of her sour vinegar visage),—and there was I——" she paused.

"Well, there were you? Go on. What were you doing? I don't think you were helping at all. I could not see that you were taking any part," said Bell. "You just stood there, looking on."

"Bless the dear innocent! What part was there for me to take? I could have talked to Harry Dorrien. I rather like Harry,—"

"So you said before."

"But Harry had nothing to say to me to-day."

"Had he not?" said Bell, a little inquisitively. "I thought I saw him——" she stopped.

"Saw him what?" Monica shot a swift glance.

"Speaking to you behind the others, as they crossed the hall. Uncle Schofield was showing Lady Dorrien the prize carnations; and you had followed them, and Mr. Dorrien followed you."

"Oh, I remember! Yes; he did just have the civility to inquire when we were going to Cullingdon? We are to go there next week, do you know? They are to fix the day, we are to ride over at tea-time, and stop dinner, and come home in the dusk. It will be delightful," she added, with animation, "and I am so glad Uncle Schofield is to go too! He is to meet us there, and find his horse waiting for him to accompany us home."

"How nice! Was that what Mr. Dorrien was saying to you?"

"He—yes—that is to say, it had been arranged before. His mother and I made it out with Uncle Schofield as soon as ever we got the others out of the way. What a time they did stop, to be sure! When I heard 'My son George' and and 'My boys at school' beginning, I knew what poor Lady Dorrien was in for. But still matters might have been worse. She did not have the full experience she might have had. Bell, I have learned one thing. When next we want to muzzle Daisy's mama, we will send for Lizzie's mama. The one fairly held the other by the heels, and tripped her up at every turn."

"I was glad when it was over. But, Monica, I am sure that the Dorrien boy, as you call him, did look at you a good deal."

"I daresay he did. I am good to look at," said Monica, coolly.

"He admires you."

"I should not be surprised if he did."

"I saw his face. I could not be mistaken. Oh, Monica, how I wish—think if it *were* so, how delightful, how very delightful it would be to leave all this behind, and be as we once were, among our own people, with our own friends, in a town house!"—the vision illuminating every feature; "oh, if—if it might be so!" she murmured. "Oh, Monica, if it might only be so!"

"You—poor—child!" A pause.

"I had no idea you felt like this about it," said Monica, almost tenderly. "I thought, I fancied we had both grown reconciled; look, how much we have to be grateful for! How kind this dear, good uncle is to us! In our whole lives ——"

"I know, I know," impatiently.

"In our whole lives we never had so much done for us before. We have but to hint at a want, or a passing fancy; I have to be careful how I even hint now, he takes it up so quickly. We are never short of money. We may buy the prettiest of knick-knacks, and the most expensive music-books and drawing materials, and—and——"

"Oh, I know. I know it all."

"You yourself said you enjoyed our evening rides as you had hardly ever enjoyed anything. What is more, he never expects anything of us in return—I mean that we cannot give. He never worries us, nor pesters us. He is even beginning to be very particular as to whom he invites to the house. Upon my word, I felt ashamed that day he came, and so humbly inquired if we would mind his bringing out his own old manager, who has been with him for so many years, and who has never missed coming out once every summer. I thought, what could it signify whether we, a pair of interlopers, minded it or not? What business had we to mind? And then, when the poor old man came, he was as nice as he could be. A number of Uncle Schofield's friends are nice, at any rate his men friends. The women—but he can't be expected to know about women. And

he likes Dame Schofield no better than we do, Bell; anyone can see that."

"What on earth is all this about, Monica?" Isabel shrugged a peevish shoulder. "It is of no use pretending. Of course downstairs we *must* pretend, we have *got* to pretend, because there is nothing else for it; but surely we may say what we really feel when we are alone."

"I *am* saying what I feel. I feel every word I say."

"But if you could, you would cut the whole thing to-morrow."

Monica's lips opened for a denial, and closed again. Not a syllable escaped.

"There I thought so," pursued her sister triumphantly. "It is all very well raking up every individual item for which we ought to make a curtsey to Uncle Schofield, and hammering out all kinds of feelings that we ought to have, and lecturing me——"

"I did not mean to lecture you."

"But when it comes to the point, you are no more content than I am. You have still got to beat down the old associations in your heart when such people as the Dorriens come here. You would like to hug them,"—

"—I should *not*."

"Good gracious, Monica!"

"The Dorriens, what are the Dorriens to us?" cried Monica, breathing quickly. "Why should we put the Dorriens on a pedestal? We have seen and known hundreds of people as good as they, or better."

"But we shall not know hundreds now."

"Lady Dorrien is nothing but a poor washed-out creature, without an opinion or idea of her own. She would have let us alone till Doomsday, and never troubled her head as to whether we existed or not, if she had not been ordered over here by——" She stopped, and the color deepened in her cheek.

"By her son," promptly responded Isabel. "So I say. Of course he brought her. And of course it was meeting us at the Grange last night which brought him. But then, when you see that, as well as I, why are you so angry?"

"Because you seem to think——" said Monica, turning away her head, "you seem to suppose that the moment anyone takes the least notice of either of us, we are to be elated and responsive, ready to rush at them, and——"

"Oh! that's it, is it? Still, you do like Harry?"

"I like Harry very well."

"Don't you think him handsome?"

"Ye—es. Fairly handsome."

"Too good for Daisy Schofield, anyway."

Monica laughed. "Much too good for Daisy Schofield."

"She does not think so, however," pursued Bell. "She has the sense not to boast of her conquest, but she is perfectly sure she has made it. I must say I was myself rather staggered by his visiting people like the Schofields in the easy way he does. What can he do it for? Can he really be as poor as Uncle Schofield said?"

"Do you mean, can he be thinking of Daisy in the light of an heiress?"

"Yes."

"Quite possibly," said Monica, with rather a strange smile. "Now, Bell, don't jump at conclusions. You are altogether in too great a hurry. Be content with your day's work as it is. Yesterday your heart was breaking lest the Dorriens should take no notice of us; to-day let it rest. They have come, they have seen, and *we* have conquered. A new adaptation of the old saying. Henceforth we shall have at least one house——," she bit her lip.

But her sister had turned away, and did not hear the admission.

"It would never do to let her know all," said Monica to herself. "If I once let her pry into my heart, and see how my very soul sickens in this cage, with all its polish and gilding, and neatness and smugness; how it excites in me a very spirit of antagonism, a demon of loathing; how the very odor of *newness* which pervades the whole is almost intolerable in my nostrils, until I can sometimes scarcely speak the words I know must be spoken, and look the pleasure and gratitude I

know must be looked—if Bell once wrung all of this out of me, she would never forget it, and we should never have another moment's safety. She would betray us both. Our only chance is in my holding her in with a tight rein, and never allowing it to relax. As long as I can assume the superior air, frown down her discontent and quench her complaints and longings, she dares not let them out openly; and, besides, she feels as if she ought to be reconciled, whether she is or not, which is half the battle. But I—oh, it is different with me! I can talk so nicely, and lay down the law so grandly, and all the time my real self is rebelling against every word. With every breath I utter a lie. Contentment, cheerfulness, reconciliation to an enviable and desirable lot! That's the text of the preacher; while do I not know in my inmost soul that I would give anything—*anything*—for one real chance of escape. I would——" Then she paused, the blaze died out of her face, and a slow, dawning smile crept over it.

"I don't know that I would marry that boy," she muttered. "But I might see."

A few days later the sisters accomplished the proposed expedition to Cullingdon Manor, a groom riding behind on the horse which was to carry Mr. Schofield on the return journey.

"How is he to get home himself?" Uncle Joseph had propounded.

But Mr. Dorrien had shown him that all would be easy. His own dog-cart would be available as far as a station a few miles off, and thence, with only one change, John Thomas could easily be landed safe at his own stables again.

"Queer in these days to be four miles from a station," had been our merchant's comment thereafter. "I don't know how people manage to live in such inconvenient, out-of-the-way places. Think of having to take out a man and horse every time you want to pop into a train! Why, the very first thing I took into consideration when I was looking out to see whereabouts I should pitch my tent, was that it should be along a good line of rail."

He little suspected that the immediate proximity of the station, with its accompanying daily din of whis-

tling and bell-ringing, was one of the drawbacks of Flodden Hall in the eyes of his nieces. True, those eyes were not affronted by the sight of passing trains, for a deep cutting ran just outside Mr. Schofield's domain, and this cutting furthermore swallowed and deadened much of the noise, until it was as imperceptible as it was possible to be, all things considered; but there was no denying that the railway line was there, that the large, white telegraph posts were visible from every window, and that the gate of the foot-passenger's path down to the little platform, was within a few hundred yards of Mr. Schofield's own gate.

To Uncle Joseph this was a convenience, and a source of complacency; to the Miss Lavenhams it was a part and parcel of the whole "mere villa" chamber of horrors.

It was with mingled sensations that they now found themselves in another sort of world, as they drew near Sir Arthur Dorrien's gates. For some distance they had traversed a long, level country road, by the side of which cottages and farm-yards had succeeded to more aspiring residences, and whose footpath had disappeared with an air of being worn out and exhausted from lack of appreciation. Only at long intervals had they encountered a passing gig or other light vehicle; and huge hay-carts, and wagoners, teams rolling leisurely along, had gradually become the only moving features in the landscape. Foot-passengers had resolved themselves into an occasional group of laborers, or school-children. Altogether, the thickly populated and carefully cultivated face of the country round Flodden Hall, bristling with roofs and turrets, and alive with neat pathways and gateways, had given place to another kind of landscape.

The sisters now beheld on every side long stretches of pasture land, woody uplands, and winding dells; while in the immediate foreground were rude, picturesque, misshapen walls, and moss-grown bridges over meandering streams.

"I had no idea we could have found a part like this anywhere within riding distance," exclaimed Monica, looking about with a glow on her cheek. "We have been riding round and round in a circle, evening after

evening, and never once broken out of the one sort of ground. It makes an immense difference going straight on for ten miles. For the last three or four we have been in another region altogether. This is like the kind of country we used to come to, Bell, after the season was over, and when Uncle and Aunt Lavenham were flying off to recruit. Do you remember? Every August it used to be, 'Where shall we recruit?' Considering that they had some sort of acquaintance with these Dorriens, it is curious that we never 'recruited' down here."

"It *is* like old times," responded Bell, looking about also. "I could almost fancy we were stopping here—I mean at the Dorriens—and had come out for a ride, and were now going home again. Do you suppose we shall be often over, Monica?"

"I daresay as often as we choose." A little curve of Monica's lip.

"And perhaps we shall come and stay the night, every now and then?"

"Provided they ask us."

"Our luggage could be sent in the dog-cart.'

"Perfectly."

"And if they would put up our horses, we could ride back next day."

"A very good arrangement."

"It would be *something*, at any rate," proceeded Bell, cheerfully. "Though it would be rather dreadful having to ride back and leave all the rest behind at Cullingdon; having the other people wondering and asking where we were going? Having to keep quiet about Uncle Schofield and all,——"

"Pooh! Nonsense! I should not keep quiet, I can tell you. I should carry it off! I should say, 'Come and look us up. We are living with a rich, bachelor uncle, and having an awfully jolly time. We have got our horses here. Come and look at them. We rode here; it is only ten miles away; can't any of you ride over and see us?' Depend upon it, Bell, none of them ever would ride over."

"Why not?"

"Because they would not have the chance," said

Monica, dryly. "I don't imagine Sir Arthur Dorrien's stable could furnish steeds for a riding party to do this twenty miles with impunity. We should have the best of the joke on our side, Bell, my dear."

Bell laughed musically.

"It *would* be fun," she said. "And, Monica, it is nice, going up to a house in the style we are going now; I mean with our horses and all so perfect. I feel as I never felt before, properly turned out from top to toe."

"So no grumps, then, my dear sister. There are to be no grumps either during our visit to-day, or after it is over. Whenever we feel inclined to contrast Sir Arthur Dorrien's ancestral halls with Uncle Schofield's Turkey carpets, we will think of—Oh, here is Mr. Dorrien!" as a figure appeared emerging from a side path. "Oh, Mr. Dorrien," said Monica, her clear voice ringing out, "here we are, you see! We have not lost ourselves by the way. And though we have no watches, we have an instinct that we are in good time."

"First-rate time," said he. "I went up to a height to look out for you, and just as I reached it, you appeared on the road below. So then I thought I should catch you here. I ran down." And as the young man spoke he looked up into the face above, and thought he had never yet seen any that could with it compare.

("By Jove! she is a beauty!" he reflected internally. "By Jove! I will remember the governor's advice. She is better even than I thought she was. Now, by Jove! I must not make a fool of myself, all the same.")

"Well I don't know, Miss Lavenham," aloud, in reply to an interrogation, "I suspect your best way will be up this short cut. The avenue takes a tremendous turn, and I'll pilot you up this bit. Your horses won't mind the grass?" And he stepped alongside briskly.

"What a delightful, delightful old place!" quoth Isabel Lavenham, to whom the picturesque decay of the grounds she now traversed, was transfigured by her own sensations. "Look, Monica, what old, old trees! What bushes of ivy! What beds of moss! We have not seen moss like this, Mr. Dorrien, since——." She appeared to forget when, gazing round with an absent air of dreamy satisfaction.

"Rather too much ivy and moss, I am afraid," replied Dorrien, lightly. "This must seem a terrible litter to you, compared with the perfection in which you live."

A quick glance from each sister.

But he was not in jest: he was really and seriously and very deeply in earnest in his efforts to put the best face on everything in and about Cullingdon on the occasion; and conscious of rotten wood, crumbling masonry, and general decrepitude, he was prepared to deprecate and disarm.

How little did he know! As the eye of either fair horsewoman wandered from point to point, taking in the mellow shade, the flickering shafts of color, the solemnity, the stillness, above all the weird seclusion of the whole, they beheld neither poverty nor deformity, they experienced no want. The wood-pigeon's note overhead, the hurrying flight of a brood of pheasant chicks across the path, the dart of a squirrel up the moss-bound bark of an oak, all awoke within their bosoms but one exulting sensation. They were among familiar haunts once more. Wood-pigeons had cooed in the woods of one country house at which they had been inmates; squirrels and pheasants had been denizens of another. Although after a fashion town-bred young ladies, each possessed an undeveloped and scarcely suspected instinct which made them susceptible to influences of the kind; and Monica especially now found herself gathering in every sight and sound with a new and vivid apprehension; insomuch that it seemed to her as if she had never really worshipped, never bent the knee at Nature's shrine before.

By her side walked Dorrien, almost in silence, but she had a woman's perception that such a silence was a greater tribute to the power of her charms than any speech could have been.

CHAPTER XI.

"IN MONICA'S PRESENCE."

Why am I stricken dumb?
Abashed, confounded, awed of heart and numb?
ROBINSON.

IN the dim light of an antique apartment, whose recesses looked invitingly cool and shady as contrasted with the glare of an August sun without, Lady Dorrien was awaiting her guests, and rose at their entrance. She thought she had never seen two more elegant figures than those which, clad in the neatest and smartest of riding habits, now advanced up the room. She fancied the whole chamber illuminated by a burst of sunlight from the glowing countenances of the sisters.

Their tall hats suited them. They never looked to greater advantage than when equipped for riding.

"Dear me! How I wish it could have been one of these!" Lady Dorrien caught herself saying in her heart. "Dear me! if Harry could only have had one of these!" It did not strike her ladyship that Harry might at the moment be wishing the same. She had only heard her son talk, as she had only heard her husband talk; she had never dreamed of informing herself by other means regarding what might be in the minds of either. Had she done so—the truth was that one had need to have been born blind, as Lady Dorrien had been mentally born, not to have perceived something by the young man's face.

Dorrien's time had come. A more unfortunate time could not have been chosen. A year, two years, any number of years ago (he had been in the world ever since he had gone to Eaton, for that matter), it would have mattered comparatively little whether or not had

come to him the experience of falling in love. He would have plunged in, and plunged out again. As it happened he had really had some difficulty in even making believe to plunge ever so slightly hitherto. He had thought women, women of all kinds, altogether in the way. Whilst he was kicking up his heels after the fashion of hot-headed youth generally, he had not cared to tie himself on to anybody, as Sir Arthur and Lady Dorrien would fain have tied him; preferring freedom, frolic, folly, to anything matrimony had to offer in exchange.

Then he had recognized that needs must when a certain person drives, and drives moreover into a very narrow space; and accordingly when just nine-and-twenty years of age it had seemed to him that a loop-hole of escape was now presenting itself in the person of Daisy Schofield. He had, as we know, looked favorably on the loop-hole, and matters were now ripe for the escape.

Daisy and her mother had been over at Cullingdon two days before, and Dorrien had played the part of a lover, an all but declared lover, to perfection. He had walked about the grounds with both the ladies—perhaps it had not been absolutely necessary that he should have insisted on Mrs. Schofield's company, but the good lady had only been flattered by his doing so; he had gathered flowers and presented them; routed out Sir Arthur and presented him; insisted on all the party making a round of the house, of the old picture gallery, the haunted chamber, the spiral staircase and turret; embarked upon long explanations and ancestral tales, and finally seen the two guests to their carriage and watched them drive off, with a smile on his face.

"That's over," he had cried, blithely. "Well, sir," to his father, who was fidgeting and expectant, awaiting confidence in the doorway above, "well, sir," running up the steps, "we got on famously, didn't we? The old den did not show off so badly after all, did it? I had to cram up the ancestors, though, by Jove! I was nearly stuck with them once or twice. I had not the rag of an idea who that old creature at the head of the staircase might be, and all I could think of was Charles

Surface and his Aunt Deborah. Ha! Ha! Ha! It was not a bad idea to make use of. And you see how well it did. You had only to bring me to book for the 'Deborah,' and Deborah or Bridget was all one to my dear mama-in-law to be. She is not what you may call 'nasty particular' on these points. Well, sir; and what do you think of—of Daisy?" with a slight alteration of tone.

"A very nice little girl," Sir Arthur had pronounced sententiously. "Nice, pretty, unaffected; I was delighted with her. And it's all right, eh, Harry? You did not get any further however, I suppose, to-day? I thought perhaps—but of course you know best; and you have but to say the word and your mother and I will do anything you wish. And you think it went off well, did you? And they were not—not—there was nothing amiss, was there?" He had been round and round, surreptitiously tinkering and patching, hiding away and smoothing over, for hours beforehand; and it had seemed to him that he had never known the tatters of the old abode more obtrusive and assertive.

But to be sure, if the Schofields had to swallow these, the Dorriens on their part had something to swallow in the Schofields themselves.

"By George! the mother won't do!" poor old Sir Arthur had had to tell himself; "and it is a providence that there's no father! The girl herself is a cut below par; yes, distinctly a cut below par. But, of course, people will understand. We can't go on, that's a fact, as we are doing, and this is our chance."

Then the two had gone in to Lady Dorrien, and had told her to write at once to the Lavenhams.

And now that the Lavenhams had come, anyone but her purblind ladyship might have perceived, as we have said, that there was another look on her son's face than the one it had worn during the visit of Daisy Schofield.

With the Schofields Dorrien had been bold, brisk, hospitable; all eye and ear for whatever might turn up; quick as lightning to cover a mischance; in the front of every proposal; taking the lead in every movement. In Monica's presence he stood silently by; only now and then raising his dark eyes to her face, and withdraw-

ing them if she turned her head his way. The talk he left to others.

Ever since Miss Lavenham's note accepting his mother's invitation had been received, he had been restless and anxious; he had gone over in his mind all he should say and do, musing as to how far he might go in making himself agreeable, how much was likely to have been heard of his overtures at the Grange, and to what extent Monica would comprehend and approve them. Now he simply forgot all this. She was there, and that was enough.

Then Sir Arther came in, internally all excitement and agitation, outwardly the urbane host, ready to do anything that in him lay to make the new visit pass off as creditably as the last had done.

Like his wife, he could not but perceive the difference between the visitors; but no more than she had done did he note any alteration in his son.

Harry had met the young ladies, had he? Ridden to meet them—glancing at Dorrien, who had half turned from the group, and was looking out of the window—Oh, only a chance encounter in the avenue? So much the better; he could give an escort for a part of the way home. Their uncle was coming, he hoped? He, Sir Arthur, had known Mr. Joseph Schofield by sight for so many years that he could not tell them how glad he was of this opportunity for making his personal acquaintance. Cullingdon was such a solitary old place, that they never saw a soul, unless they themselves imported people. As for neighbors——

"Except the De Vincis," interposed Lady Dorrien, not perceiving the drift of all this. "The De Vincis are really the only people we *can* know——"

"Pooh!—nonsense—'*Can* know,'" cried her husband gayly. "Lady Dorrien means that they are the only people within range. We are out of everyone else's way. It would be too bad to expect country neighbors to drive out all this distance, when we have no entertainment to offer, nothing going on to amuse. The De Vincis are away just now, or we might have had them over; and my dear, there are the Hailsburys, but they are in Scotland also; so that, as it is, I am afraid

we must ask these young ladies to put up with ourselves, eh, Harry? When will Mr. Schofield come? Is—has—what train is to be met, Harry?"

"The dog-cart will meet the 6.30, sir; I have given orders. Perhaps," said Dorrien, coming into the room and addressing himself to Monica Lavenham with a certain subdued inflection in his tone, "perhaps we might go out of doors first? That is, if no one is tired. The sun is not so hot as it was." He paused inquiringly.

"Delightful. We generally walk after riding," assented she; and both rose with alacrity, charmed with a proposal which so well suited their inclinations. A general movement was made towards the door.

"Am I to come, Harry—eh, Harry?" whispered Sir Arthur, at the rear.

His son nodded, then swiftly passed on. Monica had already advanced some paces along the gallery. Lady Dorrien remained behind. Presently she saw the little party cross the shrubbery, and disappear into the tangled shades behind. "Harry leads the way with the eldest," she observed. "And Sir Arthur follows with the other. And I am to entertain their uncle, when he comes. How well everything is turning out!"

She would probably have said the same if she had accompanied the walkers. She was not, as we know, observant.

"Now, Miss Lavenham," began Monica's companion, his spirits rising as he took possession of her side, "I am going to be your pilot; and my father shall not inflict upon you fish-ponds and colonnades, nor even the old heronry itself, unless you give me your word that you don't mind seeing them. We have nothing whatever to show, you know. We make believe we have—when it suits us. As a matter of fact, Cullingdon is about as devoid of 'objects of interest' as it is possible for a place to be."

"It is an 'object of interest' in itself."

Monica had turned to look on the gray pile, whose long rows of windows were now golden in the sun's rays; "I had no idea there was anything like it in these parts," she subjoined.

"Neither there is. We have outlived all our old sur-

roundings. We remain, while everything else has vanished. Gradually we too shall vanish."

"I hope not. Pray do not vanish just yet," smiling archly. "You see *we* have only just come, and it would not be kind to vanish at the very beginning of our life in these parts."

"But your uncle will tell you that our room is wanted —perhaps he may even go so far as to say that it would be preferable to our company; the truth is, Miss Lavenham, that the people of the present day—I mean *the* people, the bankers, and brewers, and merchants, those who are coming to the front, and have a right to the front——"

She listened intently.

"They are pushing us out of their way," said Dorrien, looking at her. "It is simply a question of time. They are the stronger—we are the weaker. The only hope for us would be," and he paused, "to join forces. If we could be all one,"—Another pause.

"How, one?"

"Oh, *you* know! There is hardly a family now-a-days that is not trying to do it." For his life he could not bring himself to be more explicit. "We must mingle more with each other, amalgamate with each other. We must——" The speaker checked himself abruptly.

"You mean intermarry," said Monica, in a clear, silvery voice. "My father did it."

"That's what I mean. He did it, I know. He——" and there was an accent of interrogation.

"The money soon went," said Monica, indifferently. "But, of course, one case is no criterion."

"You don't see that it might be a necessity?"

"I don't see anything, because I don't know anything."

He perceived that he was not to be allowed to say more.

"But really we do not go over very often," came in Isabel's tones from behind. "The George Schofields are only distant cousins, and they live quite four miles from us. We had never seen them before our uncle sent for us to make our home with him."

It appeared that Sir Arthur had been trying to insist upon the intimacy.

"Just your age, the eldest girl," he now proceeded, "and a nice, pretty young thing. You will soon be great friends. Lady Dorrien and I were quite taken with Miss Daisy Schofield. All Harry's doing."

Harry made a movement.

"All his good arrangement," proceeded Sir Arthur, happily unconscious. "He is quite put out by the recluse life we lead, so he has set himself to remedy it. He had not been home a day before he was over at Mrs. Schofield's. And the next thing was he made his mother call. Then they were over here on Thursday."

"Oh, were they over on Thursday?"

"And stayed an hour. It was quite a treat for my poor wife, she sees so few people. It will really be a charity if you can come now and then—come with the Schofields—make up a party——"

"What did you say, Mr. Dorrien?" inquired a sweet voice in front.

He had not spoken.

"You were listening to your father," said Monica, smiling. "And I was doing the same. We each thought—what did we think, Mr. Dorrien?"

He laughed uneasily.

"That a 'party' of the nature referred to might not be a success, was it? Have you been over to the Grange since we met you there? Do you often go over in the evenings?"

He murmured something, what, she could not tell.

"Our cousins are bright, lively girls, are they not?"

An indistinct assent.

"Especially the eldest?"

Another assent.

"Mr. Dorrien," and Monica paused, with a charming, provocative smile upon her face.

Dorrien durst not respond. He had an intuition as to what was coming.

"Had you not better begin to carry out your theory as soon as opportunity offers? Would not this be the said opportunity? You see that I—guess."

"What do you guess?" he muttered.

"The riddle," retorted she. "Just now you read me a riddle, and I was so stupid I did not for a few moments catch its meaning. But your father's conversation with Isabel has helped me. May I say it has given me the clue?"

"You are speaking in riddles yourself, Miss Lavenham. I—I—" : his tongue refused to proceed.

"Oh, I can be plainer if you like! But perhaps you don't like? You were talking just now of the necessity for amalgamating old blood with new, and I thought it was just possible—you know—*just possible* that the old blood might be the Dorriens, and the new——" She left the name unspoken. Something in his look, his bearing, the deep burn which overspread his cheek, warned her to proceed no farther. For a few minutes they walked along in awkward silence, then all at once found themselves alone, Sir Arthur and his companion having turned down a side path.

"Miss Lavenham," said Dorrien, suddenly, "what are *you* doing down here, among these people? The people we found with you the other day? You never were meant for them; you—this is not the place for *you*. This is not the kind of society you have been accustomed to. This——"

"You mean that we have left our rightful sphere?"

"Why have you done it?"

"We had to do it."

"But—forgive my asking—are you—shall you go on doing it?"

"We shall; because," said Monica, with an ineffable bitterness underlying the calm tones of her voice, "we must. Do you understand? *We must.*"

"I understand."

"We must," proceeded she, after a minute's pause. "We have no choice. And we are not to be pitied neither," she added, in a lighter tone. "You and I think it a hard fate, Mr. Dorrien, to be banished from the gay world; from all the dear delights of London; from Cowes, Ascot, and all the rest of the hum and buzz that make up life, as we call it life. But we are still young; my sister and I must try and make ourselves up afresh, so that we may fit into another kind of

existence: one not quite so amusing perhaps, but—but all we have got to look to. Perhaps we do not suit it just yet, as you see; but we shall do better by-and-by. We shall forget other days, and other scenes. Gradually they will slip out of our recollection, and lose the hold they have on us at present. Then we shall begin to harmonize with our new surroundings. We shall grow like—like Daisy Schofield for instance." She stopped abruptly. It was not in human nature not to dart a glance, and the glance was rewarded. She saw him change color, and bite his lip. It was enough.

"Yes, we could not do better than copy Daisy Schofield," she murmured meditatively.

But by this time Harry had gathered himself together.

"Miss Schofield is a very nice girl," he said, steadily; "I knew her before I knew her family. We met at a friend's house, and I thought, and I think still, that—that she——"

—"Well, that she——?"

"She is—is——" he stammered.

"Oh, yes; she is—is——". In a mocking echo of his tone. "Now what is she, Mr. Dorrien? Do describe this cousin of mine. Pretty? Amiable? Affectionate? Ah, yes—yes, to be sure. 'A sweet girl,' that's the phrase. Now, then, Mr. Dorrien?"

"I—I don't understand you, Miss Lavenham."

"Don't you? In my world—in our world—however, we understand quickly. You are quick enough. I think—I almost think—you do understand. I am almost sure you know precisely what I mean you to say. But you are not going to allow it? Are you not going to allow it? Why, Mr. Dorrien—oh, fie, Mr. Dorrien!" looking back with an arch tormenting shake of her lovely head—he had dropped behind to close a little gate through which the two had passed; "it seems to me that you are a great deal wiser than you choose to allow, Mr. Dorrien."

CHAPTER XII.

GLANCES.

Their eyes but met, and then were turned aside;
It was enough. That mystic eloquence
Unheard, yet visible, is known to all.—DEROZIER.

IT must be remembered that Monica Lavenham had never known a mother's care or training; furthermore that she had been early thrown into a world in which bashfulness, delicacy, reserve upon almost any subject, were alike at a discount. Thus it did not now appear to her that there could be any impropriety in rallying or tormenting an admirer who was trying to play a double game.

She had, as a matter of course, perceived Dorrien's sudden flame for herself; perhaps it may be said that she ought to have quenched it. To do this did not suit her. She was amused by his attitude, perhaps a very little nettled by it. It was another development of the situation, she considered. Here was a boy—even to herself she termed Dorrien a boy—who would no more have looked at Daisy Schofield than if she had been a dairyman's daughter but for her heiress-ship, here he was going for her heart and soul; and here was she, Monica Lavenham, who had been used to see "boys" of the same stamp fall at her feet by dozens, perforce obliged to stand idly by, and view the sport!

She did not want Dorrien, not she! She might have had better than he ere now. A mere pauper, with nothing but his handsome face and sweet voice—(even in talking, Harry had a musical undertone, which was pleasant to the ear),—but, after all, there was nothing remarkable in Daisy Schofield's suitor, nothing to make

anyone envious. Daisy was welcome to him; only she, Monica, must have a little diversion out of the affair: and accordingly she had so artfully and deftly introduced the subject, and been so provokingly wise and merry over it, that she had soon had the pleasure of seeing a deep flush settle over the cheek of her companion, and an uneasy restlessness manifest itself in his demeanor, as a tribute to her prowess.

She was just considering whether or not she had not gone far enough for the present, when a loud call from behind made both the walkers turn their heads, and come to a standstill. The shouter was Sir Arthur, and he was now seen at some distance down the path, frantically waving his stick, and pointing with it towards the house, a portion of which could be discerned from the point at which Dorrien and his companion stood.

"What on earth can he want?" muttered Dorrien, for ruffled and ill at ease as he was, he still would have preferred to be let alone, and to pursue a dialogue so engrossing; "what is he signalling for? We need not return yet, unless—unless you wish it," turning to Monica, "Am I taking you too far? I forget time and distance," and his tone softened. "What shall we respond? Look, they are standing still. They evidently expect us to turn round. Shall we turn round—or——?"

"By no means," said Monica, gayly. "Let them go their way, and we go ours. Ours is here, is it not?" pointing upwards. "This path leads to beauties unknown, I am sure."

"It does; it leads to an opening."

"So I thought. We will pursue that opening. We will not return. Defy them: shake your stick at them; and now, come," and laughing she turned to step forward.

Nothing loth, he was about to follow, but, no sooner was the intention manifest, than a fresh shout from the pair below, again demanded recognition and obedience.

An angry ejaculation escaped Dorrien. ("My fool of a father," he thought, "as usual putting his foot in it! Only a few minutes, a very few minutes longer, and I would have had it out with this girl. Now, how can I?

How to oegin, how to get on to the subject again, I know not. I——") "Hollo!" shouting loudly back, "hollo!" Then to Monica: "What is the signal for 'We don't understand,' Miss Lavenham?"

"I only know the signal for I *don't wish* to understand, Mr. Dorrien."

"And it?"

"You have taught me it, just now."

By such significance who would not have been confounded? So smart, so short a turn he had not been prepared for, and she had again the saucy triumph of beholding him turn his head aside, disconcerted beneath her sarcasm. They began to pace down the path.

"Mr. Dorrien," said Monica, suddenly, "if you are vexed with me, I am really sorry. The plain truth is that I have heard something about you and my cousin Daisy Schofield; and I do not know how much or how little of that something to believe." And she paused. Her pause and her insinuation alike stung him to the quick.

"Why should you believe anything?" he demanded hurriedly. "People talk. Let them talk. Of course for me it is nothing; I am only too glad, too proud; I mean, of course, it is an honor for me to have my name coupled with that of your cousin—and—but, how would she like it? Miss Schofield would be annoyed, of course."

"Oh, of course!" Monica's tone was demureness itself.

"I hope she may never hear of it," he continued.

"What, never?" "Pinafore" had not then been produced, but the retort fell naturally and mischievously from her lips. "Ah, Mr Dorrien! What, *never?*"

Dorrien tried to laugh. He had nothing to say.

"You see I do very nearly believe you," continued Miss Lavenham merrily. "Say the word, and I will quite believe, but I must have something on which to pin my faith. Something ever so small will do. A mere word."

"Take my word then," said he, angrily. "There *is* nothing, nothing whatever. At least——." He was not allowed to proceed.

"My dear fellow," interposed Sir Arthur's voice, he and Bell being now within earshot, ("Sorry to bring you back, Miss Lavenham," in parenthesis); "but Harry, my dear boy, make haste. There is Miss Schofield in her pony-carriage below. She may be turned away if we—or at least if you—do not get down fast enough. Luckily we saw her from this point; so there is yet time. She is turning in at the last gate now. Down with you; these ladies will excuse you."

"Certainly," said Monica, with an air of the most serene unconsciousness. And she knew better than even to glance at Dorrien's face.

She would not goad him too far, nor take a mean advantage. Luck was against him; to triumph would have been cruel. She would not be cruel, openly. It was only in her heart that a voice was saying, "Soho, Mr. Dorrien? This is what your word is worth? I think—I think you will have to pay for this, Mr. Harry Dorrien. I think I must teach you a lesson. It is a shabby thing to do, thus to take advantage of our fall. You think you are to look tenderly at me, and march past to Daisy Schofield's money-bags at one and the same time, do you? The march will not be over quite such smooth ground as you expect, young gentleman. *Coward!*" with a sudden flash.

And a coward pure and simple Dorrien felt as he stood beside her. He would rather have faced any living being at the moment than the occupant of the pony-carriage, to whom but one brief week ago he had felt kindly enough, and who had received from him every sort of outward demonstration of regard within the past forty-eight hours.

Now it seemed to him incredible that he had so cheerfully trotted round the place in Daisy's wake two days before; he had been totally unaware at the time that much of his satisfaction in doing so had arisen from the fact that the call of Mrs. Schofield and her daughter had cleared the path for the Lavenhams' invitation. It had been easy to persuade his parents that a collision betwixt the two parties would be unfortunate. Should it happen that the day fixed on for Mr. Joseph Schofield and his nieces to come over proved to be the

very one on which Mrs. George Schofield and her daughter had elected to return Lady Dorrien's call, the latter might not improbably consider they might also have been invited in an easy, informal manner, and might be affronted by discovering that the former were over at Cullingdon for the first time as well as they, and yet had been bidden to remain and finish the evening there; while the older acquaintances, as well as his, had had to bowl off directly a reasonable period for an afternoon call, even under the circumstances, had elapsed.

"And you know, sir, you would not care to have them stop on," Dorrien had affirmed, with perfect frankness. "You and my mother will have had enough of them very soon. They can't talk your talk; they know none of your people; and it would be a nuisance altogether."

"Only if it were to do any good," Sir Arthur had hinted.

"It would do no good, at present. They are quite happy to come over and return our call, and that will do for this week. Next week," he had conceded reluctantly, "perhaps we might attempt something. But the Miss Lavenhams," Dorrien had continued in a fresh tone, "are another sort. They won't bore you. They know all about everything. It will do you good to have them."

He had further represented that the distance between Cullingdon and Flodden Hall being considerably greater than that between the former place and the Grange, an excuse, if necessary, could be found in the extra four miles each way for the turning of a mere afternoon ride into a regular, pre-arranged expedition.

All had been successfully manipulated; and, congratulating himself upon his adroitness, Dorrien had joyfully seen the Schofields go, and the Lavenhams come; and it had never occurred to him that the hours thus carefully fenced and guarded could after all be subjected to invasion. Baulked of his purpose, rudely interrupted in the accomplishment of his desire, with Monica's taunts still rankling in his veins, and his own response still, as it were, shaming him before himself, it was as much as he could now do not to betray the impatience

and disgust with which Sir Arthur's words inspired him.

Go now? Now when his whole being was vibrating to another touch, when he had let all besides go, and had yielded himself up to one thought, one mood? Inharmonious and ominous as had been the little *tête-à-tête* so far, it had left him longing and hungering for more. As for being rescued from it, saved from it—he hated his rescuer and saver. He wished Sir Arthur's eyes had been doing anything else than busying themselves as they had been. Even if his father had seen, why could he not have held his tongue? Who wanted to know what was going on in the house, or the avenue, or anywhere? Dismay was almost swallowed up in chagrin, the thought of what he had lost well-nigh rendered him indifferent to what he might have to bear.

Nevertheless, a sort of faint hope that, if he could only contrive not to reach the hall door too soon, the pony-chaise might have turned away, and be well down the avenue by the time he got there, made him walk slower and slower, directly he was hidden from the view of those left behind.

It was, he considered, on the cards that Daisy might simply have come as the bearer of a note or message, which could be delivered without her herself entering within. Accordingly, if her groom were nimble enough, and the servant who answered quick enough, the whole transaction might be over ere he got round the corner—he was at the back of the house, threading the shrubbery as he thus cogitated—and before many more steps had been taken the sound of wheels smote on his greedy ear. He stopped to listen. All right, the pony-chaise was beyond a doubt in full retreat from the front entrance, and, cringing behind a clump of evergreens, he espied it the next moment go smartly by. It went, but—his face fell! It was, in so far as he was concerned, empty: no Daisy Schofield sat therein.

Dorrien's heart sank, and his feet and arms hung like lead, as he slowly made his way out from the bushes, and advanced to the front door. There he was met, as he knew he should be met, by the following announcement;

"Miss Schofield, sir. Gone in to her ladyship, sir. The carriage has been sent to the stables."

Daisy was sitting by his mother as he entered the apartment so recently illuminated by another face and form; and it required a fresh struggle to affect the joyous eagerness of a lover, when noting, as Dorrien instantly noted, that the very chair in which the latter had sat within the hour was that chosen by the new comer. Daisy, moreover, looked well and pretty sitting there. A slight diffidence, all the more becoming because it was unusual, rendered her less loquacious than usual. She had come, because she had determined to come, and because she usually did what she was determined to do. At breakfast that morning she had announced a half-formed intention of driving herself over to Cullingdon, and by word of mouth inviting Mr. Dorrien to join in some forthcoming festivities. Her brothers and sisters had scouted the idea; hence she had come. She was not going to have anything she chose to do scouted by anyone. Why should she not go to Cullingdon? Why should she not go in and see Lady Dorrien? Why should she mind? What was there to mind? It had ended in her going, partly in order to brave it out, partly from another cause which need not here be inquired into.

But all the same she had not liked her errand when it came to the actual point; and it had needed all the welcome which a hostess mindful of stringent orders and admonitions could bestow, to set her at anything like ease. At Dorrien's step she now turned, and blushed; and he, poor wretch! saw the blush.

"We caught a glimpse of you from the heights" he observed, it being necessary to observe something. "My father saw you, and I hastened down. My father would have come with me, but he is escorting your cousins, the Miss Lavenhams, to see the view."

"Oh, are the Lavenhams here?" said Daisy.

"They rode over about an hour ago." He had seen in an instant that secrecy on this point would simply lead to nothing.

"Rather a long ride," rejoined Daisy, who was not herself much of a horsewoman. "But I do not believe

Monica and Isabel care about that. They are often out long after dusk, and seem to have gone all over the country."

"Dear me, alone?" inquired Lady Dorrien, who never went anywhere alone.

"Oh, no; my cousin, Mr. Schofield, goes with them."

"He is coming here for them, to escort them on their ride home," said Dorrien, thinking of another escort that was likewise to be offered.

Sitting there, talking of Monica, and reflecting that in a very short time he would be free to fly back to her, he began to feel at once less guilty and less impatient. "Mr. Schofield has never been at Cullingdon before, and as it is useless to invite him out in the day-time, my father suggested his coming later," he proceeded.

"Oh yes," said Daisy, and opened the mission on which she had presumably come.

This was to gain support for a projected village entertainment.

But with the change of topic, another change appeared. Dorrien became cold, uninterested, unintelligent: doubtful if the scheme would work; was inclined to think it very unlikely that sufficient talent could be got together at that time of year; was uncertain of his own movements; was, in short, so completely and emphatically a wet blanket, that Lady Dorrien, who sat maternally by, ready or not to think it the best idea in the world according to his lead, at once began to feel that nothing more ridiculous or more unattainable had ever been projected.

All in a moment a single sentence changed the face of the whole. Daisy, apparently obtuse, was disposing of objection after objection, and meeting difficulty after difficulty, when she chanced to observe amongst other items, "We should at least be lucky in Monica Lavenham."

She might have guessed something from the silence that ensued. It lasted some seconds; then, though Dorrien could never tell how it was done, he found himself adopting an entirely reverse attitude from that he had previously taken, and could never recall

properly how and in what manner the change of front was effected. He was just conscious of a gleam of faint surprise on his mother's face, and of a curious gleam of another sort on that of the other, and wondered whether or not he had betrayed himself.

He was now as ready to forward the scheme as he had erst been backward in agreeing to it. A village play? It was the very thing. Any little drawing-room play would do. There were dozens of such plays to be had. He had only been afraid of Miss Schofield's embarking on too much, projecting on too large a scale, over-doing herself, in short; he had not meant for a moment that there would be any danger of failure; and as Miss Schofield said, with—with two such—with the Miss Lavenhams to help—they knew about such things—they would be invaluable. He was getting into deeper water than was safe, when Daisy herself held out a helping hand.

"Oh dear, yes," she observed unconcernedly. "Of course I meant Monica and Isabel to be *in it*. We want some tall girls, and there are very few tall girls about. Then I suppose we may reckon upon you, Mr. Dorrien," rising to go.

He was to be reckoned upon to any extent.

"And about the end of next month?"

About the end of next month or any month.

"Perhaps you would speak to my cousins," proceeded Daisy, standing to consider. "It would be as well to secure them. And Uncle Schofield did say something about Scarborough. So we must take care, in case he has fixed upon that very time for Scarborough. Perhaps you would not mind asking them, when they come in presently, Mr. Dorrien?"

He would even improve upon her commission; he would not wait until they came in, he would go and seek the Miss Lavenhams. Then Daisy made her adieux; and I am ashamed to say that, in the rebound of his spirits, and in the further anticipation, to which the visit had given rise, Dorrien shone forth again as the assiduous lover, intent upon fetching dust-cloak and parasol, enamored of this accoutrement and that; even lingering upon the doorstep to admire the dainti-

ness of the vehicle, and the gloss on the pony's coat.

He took off his cap and held it in his hands as she drove away. The cool air fanned his brow; and as he thus stood bareheaded, the dark rings of his hair scattered hither and thither, and the deep glow of his sunburnt cheeks looking yet ruddier in the rays of the sinking sun, Daisy often thought of him thereafter.

A turn of the drive gave her yet another glimpse.

He was tossing his cap in the air. No sight had ever before moved her like this. She did not guess, she *knew*, what it meant.

CHAPTER XIII.

NEW OPINIONS AT THE GRANGE.

Like the false fruit of the lotos,
Love alters every taste:
We loathe the life we are leading,
The spot where we are placed.—L. E. L.

ONE of the strangest things in human life is the estimate which every individual being forms of another; this estimate being so much affected and influenced by the nature of each, that none among us but alike measures, and is measured, from a thousand standpoints.

The infinite variety of character, disposition, and temperament with which the human race is endowed, together with the infinitesimal shades and gradations in each one of these, and the imperceptible but no less positive manner in which they act and reach between and among us, make it as impossible for any single person to think of another as he or she actually *is*, as it would be for any two to unite in absolutely equal judgment of a third.

Hitherto in these pages we have only beheld Daisy Schofield through the medium of others' eyes; let us now endeavor to discover whether she has or has not been truthfully dealt with at their hands.

First of all, then, we may as well avow a. once that Daisy was not her mother's Daisy.

When poor Mrs. Schofield in her usual, fond, effusive manner would seek to depict her eldest daughter as a martyr to intellectual exertions and acquirements, as a paragon of industry, and living encyclopedia of knowledge, Daisy would hump her shoulder, and inwardly wish mama would not make a fool of her.

When the drawing societies and the reading societies were inquired into, she would answer shortly. When she caught Monica's eye on the subject she would color up.

The truth was this. The little Lancashire girl had native shrewdness and native honesty ; and as the former enabled her to perceive herself possessed of only ordinary abilities, so the latter made her spurn the attempt to appear other than she was.

From earliest days she had stoutly maintained this wise and sensible view of the case ; but all her struggles availed nothing beneath the persistency of Mrs. Schofield's belief. Mrs Schofield thought that Daisy talked nonsense, and that George talked nonsense, and that they were all really too foolish about themselves. Modesty was all very well, but when it came to protesting that they couldn't do this, and they couldn't do that, and refusing to show their drawings when asked for, it was really too bad ; and for her part she did not understand such goings on.

To tell her that Ethel and Rosa Higgins drew better than Daisy ! That Maggie Maybole sang better than Lottie ! That John Barnby had made a cabinet in his workshop which George could not have made !

She wondered what they were all coming to. They really took a delight in provoking her ; she declared they did.

Well, she knew better. She knew what was said of them behind backs. She could tell, if she chose, what this one and that one had said to her very face. But, to be sure, it was not for her to repeat compliments, when compliments were like to be so ungraciously received,—and the good soul would bounce off in a huff, or in what was as nearly a huff as a person so uniformly good-tempered could achieve.

Poor woman, she really would feel aggrieved, she was so sure of having right on her side. Illiterate, and only half-educated herself, it was perhaps excusable that the natural result of good schools and tuition in various accomplishments should present itself to her mind under another aspect; that she should see in children who were not wholly idle nor frivolous, miracles of talent, examples of success.

That they bargained for a subscription to a circulating library, and for having some of the monthly magazines lying on their tables, meant with her that they were students and scholars. That they chose to know a little of what was passing in the world outside their own small circle, argued them profound politicians. Their simple efforts after art, their dabblings in decorative furniture, their rudimentary attempts at concerted music, even their very needlework and fancy work, all went into the same scale. To say that her geese were swans is to give but a very poor idea of the noble birds beheld by her in the homely flock by which she was surrounded.

It is but just to the young people to repeat here, what has been hinted above, namely, that they, or at any rate some of them, would have dispelled the illusion if they could. Having however, long before they appear in these pages, discovered that this was a task beyond their strength, even George and Daisy had in time become acclimatized, and had learned to take their mother as they found her.

With her new cousins, Monica and Isabel Lavenham, Daisy Schofield had indeed made a faint endeavor to discover her real self; but so provokingly had the revelation been met, so thoroughly had the new-comers imbibed the earlier portraits presented by the parent, and so obviously were they out of touch with one and all their new-found connections, that she had swiftly withdrawn every confidence, and had told herself resentfully that it was worth nobody's while to care what was thought by two such scornful, disagreeable fashion-plates of fine ladies.

That the Grange was made fun of at Flodden Hall, Daisy more than half suspected. That Monica meant

sarcasm behind innocence on occasions innumerable, it was easy to perceive. That Monica despised herself? Yes, she felt very nearly sure that Monica despised herself; despised her, moreover, not merely as an inmate of a despised house, but with a purely personal disdain.

Was this the case? It was.

And herein we see an instance of what has been above asserted, namely, that we do all of us at times so act and re-act upon one another as to make perfectly just estimates impossible.

Monica Lavenham had a baleful effect upon Daisy Schofield. In Monica's presence Daisy could not shine, do what she would. A secret uneasiness would sharpen her tone, roughen her manner, cause her to assume more self-assertion, more aggressive self-confidence and importance than she would ever be known to exhibit on other occasions. With Monica's entrance the very hairs on her head would bristle and stiffen. The children would wonder at the petulance and irritability of their usually cheerful dispenser of small benefits. Mrs. Schofield, all unconscious, would placidly observe: "Dear me, what has come to Daisy? Something, sure, has put Daisy out." George would find his sister moodily gazing from a window after the visitors had departed, and when he would inquire—as possibly he might inquire—if anything were the matter, would be told "nothing."

Was it because of this thinly-veiled antagonism that Monica, on her part, could never resist making Bell laugh when Daisy's name arose between the two in private?

Monica had not begun by taking much account of Daisy. She had simply classified her according to Mrs. Schofield's primary delineations; but presently it must be owned that, upon discovering the light in which a certain pair of jealous eyes looked upon herself, she began to experience a delicate sense of cat-and-mouse pleasure in putting forth her claws. No one knew better how to play cat-and-mouse, and poor Monica had never been taught that there was any harm thus playing.

She looked down upon Daisy Schofield, and it did

Daisy good to be looked down upon. That was her view of the matter.

"Pert, little, underbred thing!" cried she, with her beautiful chin in the air; "I like the fat, old, vulgar mother infinitely better. I shall be quite friends with *her*. But I can't stand Daisy."

And accordingly, Daisy had to be taught, and that in the best style out, that she was not to be "stood." All her cousin's humors, her caprices, her disdain, her airs and her graces were for the eldest Miss Schofield's especial benefit—the younger ones merely coming in for their share or not, according to chance,—while the poor, tiresome mother, the Mrs. Schofield from whom one and all were wont to flee, the droning, drowsy narrator, who was barely endured abroad and thrust aside at home—towards her Monica would, out of sheer contradiction it might be, but perhaps also with a mingling of some better motive, be so gentle, considerate, and respectful, that even her uncle felt as if he had hitherto under-rated a very worthy woman.

Then Dorrien entered upon the scene, and our two young ladies did not like each other any better than before. Previous to his introduction to the Miss Lavenhams the thought of him had been a secret source of exultation to Daisy. The principal part of his wooing had been done prior to the arrival of the sisters at Flodden Hall; and he had only delayed putting the final touch to it till after he should have had his last bachelor season in town, from a conviction that once fairly "booked," neither the widow nor her daughter would see any need for further indulgence of the luxury.

As an engaged man he could not have rebelled,—but he had laughed in his heart as he told himself that he was not yet an engaged man. He had fully meant to become so; there had been no idea of crying off, not the very slightest; no, he had only stolen a few weeks' leave of absence from the neighborhood; and, curiously enough, this at the very time when Monica and Isabel Lavenham had been reluctantly precipitated into it.

Thus they had never met him. The previous year

he had been travelling, and had not been in London at all; and the sisters had, as we know, only enjoyed two seasons there. But for such causes there would almost certainly have been a previous acquaintance. They knew the same people, went to the same houses, frequented the same resorts. Innumerable as are the distinct "sets" in London society, a recognized member of any one is tolerably sure to know sooner or later the greater part of the other recognized members. It is necessary to remind my readers of this, that it may be understood how speedily and easily Dorrien had been at home with the two, with whom no one else was at home at all. Daisy had bitten her lip more than once as she sat by almost entirely neglected and left out in the cold, during the first occasion of their meeting at the Grange. She had divined, as by instinct, the impression made by her beautiful cousin; and an entirely new feeling regarding Dorrien from that hour took possession of her breast.

Hithero he had been her great reserve force. She had felt—all of them had felt—that once Dorrien spoke out, they could cope even with the Lavenhams. Good Mrs. Schofield, who alone was serenely confident that in themselves and by themselves she and hers were on a level with any mortal being, was yet willing enough to pour into the ears of her cousin Joseph's fine ladies the pride with which her heart was bursting.

But she had been restrained by her daughter. Daisy had not been so foolish as to lay herself open, or to permit her mother to lay her open, to a chance of being ridiculed. She had been, she would have said, sure, certain of Dorrien; but all the same, it had ended in her exacting from one and all absolute silence concerning him; while to herself she had hugged the thought of presenting to her cousin such a lover as even Monica Lavenham might have been proud to call one.

Beforehand her secret had been closely kept; and though on the re-appearance of Dorrien in the neighborhood, she had permitted herself to mention his name to Isabel Lavenham—being fairly amicable with Bell—it had been under the prudent supposition that to suppress it altogether would have been more pointed, more

likely to attract attention, than to let it arise and pass in general conversation.

She had calculated, moreover, that Dorrien, who had lost not a day in renewing his suit, having indeed resolved upon bringing it now to a point—had probaby been remarked by others on his daily ride to the Grange,—(he had ridden over there on three successive evenings before that on which we first beheld him),—and accordingly an easy reference to the subject would seem in Bell's eyes the simplest thing in the world.

But do people ever refer to such subjects easily?

And now imagine a clumsy, tactless, inexperienced male presuming to consider himself a match for two fair ones in strategic wiles. It is really almost pathetic to think of Dorrien's credulity at this point. He had a cheerful conviction, for instance, of having duped Miss Daisy in the most artful manner possible, when he handed her into her pony carriage and saw her drive away from the front steps at Cullingdon the day she called by herself there. He had not the faintest suspicion that all the time she had been smiling and chatting during her stay, her eyes and ears had been on the stretch, and that not a change of color, nor an altered accent escaped them.

She knew—who better?—that the Miss Lavenhams were his guests that day. She had come because they were so; because of a burning desire to hear and see, to know and discover what was going on.

And he had fancied her all unconscious and unobservant when she made that innocent suggestion about the village play! He had dreamed that his swift change of front, the light that flashed into his eye, the eagerness in his voice, all the nameless indications with which face and form alike were trembling, had left him unbetrayed!

His immediate attendance on her? She had not been deceived by that. Had she not witnessed the restlessness, the disquietude which almost immediately set in; the nervous, uncontrollable movements which told of impatience and dissatisfaction; the swift rebound of relief and elasticity when the ordeal was over?

Ah, poor Daisy! A dull pain gnawed at her heart

during that homeward drive through the green lanes.

Dorrien had charmed more than her fancy by this time. It needed but one such day's experience to convince her of the bitter truth.

Let us take a slight retrospect.

Dorrien was unlike any man whom Daisy Schofield had ever met before. George's friends and her own friends were, as she would have told you, all very well: sprightly, jocular, good-looking, go-ahead. Taking one with another, she had until lately seen no reason to be discontented with them. Their talk had suited her; she had not found them, nor their ways, nor their looks, nor their clothes distasteful. Her standard had been easily reached.

But then came Dorrien, and for the first time in her life this young girl beheld—what shall we call him? A man of fashion? A man about town? A smart man? A club man? A man whose every association and connection is with such attributes and spheres? To say that Dorrien was a gentleman does not express all this. There are many hundreds of perfectly well-born and well-bred men, fit for any company, equal to any occasion, who have yet no trace of the bearing, the carriage, the—truth compels such details—the *tailoring* of your gay bachelor of St. James's. Dorrien was simplicity itself, but his very simplicity was a thing unattainable. The self-satisfied and flourishing sprigs of respectability to whom the Grange was an open house, both had what he had not, and lacked what he possessed.

It was about this time that Daisy began to find Freddy Wilkinson "officious," and Teddy Oliver "unbearable." She had been wont to think Freddy's anticipation of every wish, his rising to open every door, and his flying to render every attention, as so many proofs of polite deportment; now his solicitous inquiries and tender cares were tiresome. Master Oliver, on his part, fared no better. Teddy was a dull youth whom nobody ever thought worth taking trouble about; but it was understood that as George's friend, he was to be permitted to come out to The Grange as often as George liked, sit down at the lower end of the table at dinner—his chosen

place—and hold solemn converse with his host on matters interesting to their two selves, but to no one else at table.

Such manners presently came to be voted abominable by Miss Daisy Schofield.

She had grown, moreover, to despise the outward appearance of both youths. Their shirt fronts had a knack of bulging out in front; Dorrien's never bulged out. They were anxious about their ties and their wristbands; she would catch them taking furtive peeps at the mirror, and pulling this and that straight at intervals; Dorrien never looked into mirrors, and never needed to pull anything straight.

It is a sharp test to which a young critic is put when she begins to perceive all this. We know that in a certain rank the ordinary dress suit of a gentleman has over and over again made the fustian of a rustic swain unbearable in feminine eyes. There was almost as much difference between Dorrien's suits and the suits of the young men above named, as between theirs and the working-clothes of a day-laborer.

And betwixt them and Dorrien himself there was further a great and impassable gulf. It was not that he was uncivil to them, nor even that he avoided them; on the contrary, he was perfectly ready to talk and be talked to; but he would have conversed with grooms and stable-boys in the same bland, agreeable manner.

He was simply an inhabitant of another world.

Whether he found the world in which he was now sojourning congenial or not, he was too wise a traveller to let appear. He was its denizen for the nonce; and it was his business to conform to its usages and flatter its interests.

Accordingly, he chatted with one and another, choosing topics in which they were interested, and about which they were likely to be well informed; whereat all who met Mr. Dorrien at The Grange were entirely pleased, and quoted his sayings and opinions with animation thereafter. But as to introducing any subjects of his own, or supposing that he might have a single point in common with any member of this herd of

strange creatures, I really do not think the idea once occurred to Dorrien.

That, again, had gradually become apparent to Daisy, as day by day she had eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Once begun, she had been unable to stop eating, and her eyes were thus ever opening more and more.

It was necessary, however, to hide within her own bosom, and to brood over in secret, all that was going on there! None of it could be confided with any hope of reciprocity. Even the younger ones would have laughed at her. Tottie would have said, as pertly as Daisy herself would once have said, that such comparisons were ridiculous; that the whole thing was ridiculous; and that she, for her part, could not imagine how anything so ridiculous could ever have entered into her sister's ridiculous head. Mrs. Schofield's cap strings would have stood on end with bristling ire. "Ridiculous" would not have been the word in her mouth. By no suggestion or supposition would her wrath have been moved to a like extent. She and hers not good enough for anybody—her George's friends not fit company for anybody—for a prince of the blood royal, if need be? Well, she had never expected to hear *that* said, least of all by her own daughter! And of young Wilkinson and young Oliver, too? Freddy Wilkinson's father could buy up the Dorriens any day; and the Olivers could hold their heads as high as any people in the place.

It would have been hopeless to suggest that Freddy, Johnny, or Tommy should have been kept out of Dorrien's way. Such a proposition would not improbably have ended in Dorrien being kept out of theirs. Mrs. Schofield had a temper; a temper, it is true, which did not often appear, but was there for an emergency; and as we all know, the most peaceable maternal bird will fly out in defence of her young.

Nor would George himself have been any easier to handle. At the best of times he was not partial to the company of Daisy's new admirer. "I hate to find that swell here," he would mutter, when he came home at six o'clock, tired, dishevelled, anxious only to be let

alone, and to be permitted to slouch about, and in and out, without anyone's interference or notice, till dinner time. "If he must come, why can he not come in the afternoon? Why must he always be here in the evening?"

The answer to which might thus have been given: George's evening was Dorrien's afternoon; having always been accustomed to make calls between five and seven o'clock—a time which was certainly pleasanter for taking a long country ride than between three and five, in the heat of an unusually hot summer—he had seen no reason for altering his habit, even though it did entail his being there when the elder son of the family came plodding up the drive on his daily return from the town.

Accordingly, the cool, easy figure, reposing on a garden chair beneath the shade, and looking as if it had reclined there all day, would not infrequently be the first sight to meet and vex George Schofield's ill-used eyes, as he peeped over the hedge at a well-known point, once the chairs had taken up their permanent out-of-door place on the lawn.

Dorrien used to turn his smooth head lazily round as the new-comer approached, and extend a few fingers when he was near. We do not say that he presented only two fingers, but certainly he did not give the hand. In his own mind, he rather wished that there were no need for giving anything. He could be pleasant to the other young men whom he met at The Grange; they were nothing to him,—but nothing becomes something when it takes the shape of a brother-in-law. George was rather a vulgar-looking fellow—it was a pity there was a George.

And George, on his part, would invariably be at his worst when thus caught. He would be weary, and dusty, and untidy, and pale-faced. Pre-occupied with his own affairs, the sight of the guest would cause him to look sullen. Sullenness does not improve any countenance.

Dorrien, on the contrary, would be in perfect order, and perfectly disengaged and gracious.

So marked would be the contrast, and so obvious was

it which was the sufferer thereby, that Daisy, out of sheer *esprit de corps*, would be annoyed and mortified, even though she alone were by to see.

Once she had gone so far as to make a suggestion on the subject. She did not do so a second time.

A flare of sudden anger burst over her brother's face. George's tongue was loosened to the extent of making him more disagreeable than could have been conceived possible, even by those who knew the young man well. What? Go into the house? Go into the house until visitors had left? That was a nice idea, to be sure! When he had been boxed up in a beastly, dirty, reeking office ever since the early morning, to say that he was to be done out of the only mouthful of fresh air he ever got! That was a pleasant thing to say to a fellow! Because he was not grand enough for her visitors, forsooth! It was like a sister to insinuate that he was not fit to stand alongside of that fool of a fellow of hers. And pray, who and what was this Dorrien that they should make a fuss about him? Everyone knew that the Dorriens were as poor as rats, and that Liverpool people thought nothing of them. It was all rot young Dorrien's coming over, and making believe he was after Daisy. All rot: Dorrien came because——, but at this point Daisy would fly. She would fly rather than stay and argue the point. Nothing was gained by such passages-at-arms.

As regularly as Dorrien reclined in the garden chair at six o'clock, so regularly did he see a somewhat short, broad, thick-set figure stump up the drive, newspaper in one hand, stick or umbrella in the other; and as regularly did he think it rather a pity that there was a George.

CHAPTER XIV.

MISS LAVENHAM'S EDUCATION.

Whether we smile or weep,
Time wings its flight:
Days, hours, they never creep,
Life speeds like light.—ANON.

"AND really and truly you would prefer not to go?" said Joseph Schofield, at breakfast, one morning. "You would rather stay quietly at home, than be off with the rest to the sea? Mind you, it was not to have been Blackpool, nor Southport, nor yet the Isle of Man. Those places are all very well; Ramsay's nice enough, but vulgar; but I can see that they are not the thing, none of them are the thing for *you*."

"Oh, Uncle Schofield!" Monica was always being touched by her uncle's profound and artlessly expressed homage.

"They are not," repeated he, calmly drinking his coffee. "They do for the Palmers."

His nieces laughed.

"Oh, they do very well for them," proceeded the speaker, all unconscious. "The Palmers and the George Schofields, and their set are just the people for Ramsay. It's thick with them. George—the lad George—finds lads like himself all over the place; and Daisy and Tottie find all the other Daisys and Totties they know. That's why they fancy the Isle of Man. They like to take their friends with them. Mrs. George would not know herself if she was set down in a place like Scarborough, for instance."

"But I thought——." A look from her sister checked Bell.

"Scarborough is a most fashionable resort," said Mr. Schofield, impressively. "At Scarborough you would

find numbers of the aristocracy, of the London folks you and your sister "—(he had got into the habit of addressing Monica)—"are accustomed to associate with. We should go to the best hotel, and see all that there is to be seen. I am told that the bands and the promenades are the best in England. But don't suppose *I* want to go," added the speaker hastily, aware that in his secret heart he had been rather inclined to dwell upon the prospect.

"You see we have had such a change already," replied Monica with a cheerful intonation which somehow always conveyed the whiff of a compliment. "It was such a change for Bell and me to come straight away from London, and find ourselves in a part of England in which we had never been before, that we are only just beginning to feel at home; are we not, Bell? At first it all felt strange. We did not know the places; nor the people; nor your ways; nor you yourself," smiling across the tea-tray. "Everything was so unlike what we had ever been accustomed to, that we had to *learn* it all. Now that we are learning, it would be a pity to interrupt the course of education. We are getting on nicely; we are getting to understand——." She paused.

"Aye, that's since you have been at Cullingdon," said her uncle, handing back his cup for some more. As he did not glance at the niece who took it, he did not perceive that she reddened.

"Cullingdon? Oh," and in despite of all she had maintained upon the subject, Monica could not help wishing that another pair of eyes would be equally blind; "I—yes—I suppose Cullingdon helps. But indeed, Uncle Schofield," rather eagerly, "indeed it is not only because we go there; it is because we are beginning to know other nice people as well as the Dorriens."

"The De Vincis, and the Alverstokes."

"No, no; not them at all. I don't care much about the De Vincis; and I detest the only Alverstokes we ever knew, and should probably detest equally this branch of the family. They are smart people, of course; and it is as well to know them, and to go to their houses—(by the way I suppose they will ask us),—but

I was thinking of quite other kinds of people with whom we have lately become acquainted. I must tell you, Uncle Schofield—I am sure you will not mind my telling you—that when Bell and I first came and saw the friends, the neighbors whom—whom we fancied were the only people we should ever meet—were the only people you lived among—we—our hearts did a little sink. You know, dear uncle," affectionately, "you know the cousins at the Grange and at Fairlawn, and others like them are not—not—," she stopped abruptly, somewhat at a loss.

"I know, my dear, I know."

"And you do not mind my saying it? But, you see, we had no idea that we had only seen the worst."

"Monica!" a breathless remonstrance from her sister, and both girls glanced apprehensively at their elderly relation.

It was not like Monica to have made such a slip.

Mr. Schofield, however, had only a placid and faintly twinkling smile upon his face. In his heart he was thinking, "Lord, if only Mrs. George and the lot of them could have heard that!" That he was neither indignant nor astonished was at once apparent, and accordingly, "He is a perfect darling!" internally cried the guilty Monica, and she could almost have hugged the grizzled head opposite. "He is far, far better than he looks. He may not look it, but he has a soul above Flodden Hall."

"It was very naughty of me to say that, Uncle Schofield," she now proceeded, reassured and anxious to persevere in her exposition, "but you see it slipped out. We *were* rather disappointed, rather astray and stranded, you know. I only say this because it is all right now; don't you understand, uncle? We are no longer in the least stranded."

An inward protest on Bell's face.

"Not in the least," repeated the speaker, with resolute emphasis. "And that is why we do not care about Scarborough. All the better people have come back to this neighborhood now that the partridge shooting has begun. And some of them are very nice people; quite pleasant people. There are the Rowlands, for instance,

and the Carnforths, and the Shillingfords. I daresay, before we had come to live here, we should have been stupid enough to class all of these with——"

"—With the George Schofields and the Palmers?"

"Why, yes," said Monica, laughing, "that was what I really meant. We thought all Liverpool and Manchester people were the same. But they are not the same; they are as different as possible. The Rowlands are——,"

"—A first-rate old Liverpool family." Mr. Schofield finished the sentence as though assenting to it. "Oh, I could have told you that. But, of course, I did not like to say anything; I did not want to set you against the others. Oh, I knew well enough that there were some really goodish houses to go to," with a little air of pride; "but then I thought, 'Wait a bit, and they'll find it out for themselves;'—that was what I thought. The Rowlands are good enough for anybody; they might be in the county set; but they don't lay themselves out for it. They keep on in the same old way they have kept for years and years. Their sons have always been gentlemen, and had the education of gentlemen. Harrow has been their school for generations; so old Rowland told me the other day. He was there himself, and so were all his brothers. The daughters marry well—not flash marriages—they don't go in for a two-penny-half-penny younger son of a lord, and keep turning up at their father's house whenever they are short of money; they marry good sound men, not always business men—one of their husbands is a member of Parliament," impressively, "and I never heard that any of them did amiss. Oh, the Rowlands are very highly thought of, and I hear that when they are in London they go to all the London balls."

It was impossible to resist a smile, but the sisters hid theirs in their tea-cups.

"Yes, I liked them," said Monica, next. "I liked their entire absence of pretension, and their nice, homely, old-fashioned ways. As you say, Uncle Schofield, the sons are gentlemen; not smart men, but good sort of steady, plain——,"

"—Plain? Do you call them plain? Ernest Row-

land is supposed to be most tremendously good-looking about here. Of course I am no judge, but I have always been told so," quoth Mr. Schofield, entering into the spirit of the conversation. "He is a great, big, swashing fellow, as his father was before him, with the same fine head of hair. Old Rowland always was proud of that head of hair of his."

"I meant no disrespect to the hair," said Monica, "nor to Mr. Ernest Rowland's claims to beauty. He is good-looking; and so is the little boy—what is his name? Bertie? But what I intended saying was that they were not—not——"

"—Not like Mr. Dorrien?"

"Yes. Not like Mr. Dorrien." Although startled by so sudden a turn, she was able to reply to the question, and even to wonder why it had been put. But her uncle resumed without apparently having had any occult motive.

"Dorrien has an air," he said, reflectively, "that the Rowlands can't catch. Put old Rowland beside Sir Arthur Dorrien and you see a grand-looking, striking-looking old fellow contrasted with a withered, wizened, ricketty bit of a scarecrow. Sir Arthur looks for all the world like a half-starved deer beside a majestic short-horn bull, but the deer has something the bull has not. Young Dorrien——."

He paused.

Neither auditor broke the pause.

"They tell me young Dorrien is after Daisy Schofield," concluded the speaker, with a little laugh. "I don't believe it."

"Then there are the Shillingfords." Monica prudently, perhaps a little hurriedly waived the discussion. "The Shillingfords are really very nice. I do not say it to please you, my dear uncle, though I know you like them, and wish us to like them; but because both Bell and I were so very much pleased with all we saw that day we went to the Shillingfords'."

Mr. Schofield had been absent for a few days, during which some experiences had been gone through.

"The children were so nice, were they not, Bell?" continued Miss Lavenham, glancing at her sister with

a frown, for Bell was still looking far too much amused, having vastly appreciated the Dorrien interlude. "Such dear, polite little things; and so charmed to be taken any notice of, yet not in the least spoilt. Oh! they were funny too; they made us laugh; some of the things they said were really witty and original. What was that about the cow, Bell? And Mrs. Shillingford was so simple, and pretty, and pleasant," proceeded Monica, rippling on with anxious care, "I was quite surprised when we heard afterwards who she was; though I need not have been, for of course the best people never talk of who they are. Oh, we shall like Mrs. Shillingford. But I forgot, Uncle Schofield, your being away this week has thrown you quite into arrears about us and our doings. We have got to tell you of our call at the Carnforths. Did we tell you of that? No, I am sure we did not, because it happened the very afternoon you left; and I am afraid I forgot to put any news into that wretched scrap I wrote. Oh, you will be amused to hear about us and the Carnforths. Bell and I mean to have a great deal of entertainment out of the Carnforth family. You must know, my dear uncle, that the reason they rushed to call upon us the very day after they returned from Scotland, from their uncle's moor—(each one in turn took pains to inform us immediately about their 'uncle's moor'),—was that they consider they are the only people about here with whom we can possibly associate. They are by way of being themselves far too fine for the place——"

"Too fine? That's good!" cried Mr. Schofield. "Is that the idea? When I can remember old Carnforth Liverpool to the backbone! Always among the better stamp of Liverpool men, I grant you; always rather grand in his way; but very well pleased to turn his honest penny with the rest of us, and as good a business man as you could find on the Exchange."

"What is the present Mr. Carnforth?"

"A Liverpool man, too, and nothing else. Surely *he* was not saying——,"

"—Oh, no, he said nothing. Indeed we only just saw him arrive in his dog-cart as we drove off."

"Came straight out by the four-twenty train. He

goes out early, I know. But he goes in as regularly as I do, and makes no bones about it. Well, and the ladies?" He was all attention.

"The mother was very entertaining," said Monica, smiling at the recollection. "She came in from the garden with a large cottage bonnet on, her basket full of flowers, and with garden scissors hanging on a ribbon from her arm. She was the country lady, you know. She had been 'down to the farm,' she informed us, and had 'looked in on their little school' on her way back. She was expecting guests from the North, 'shooting men.' Now that 'the shooting has begun,' the 'house will be full all the autumn.' And then she ran on about the partridges, and the coverts, and the keepers, and the luncheon-pony, till Bell and I began to wonder where we were, and if it was possible that we were sitting in the drawing-room of the white house we had passed so often, and had always thought was so very like your own, Uncle Schofield."

"Eh? It is a larger house than this, my dear."

"Larger? Oh, yes, it is larger, I daresay; but still it has the same appearance; the same aspect: bright, and pretty, and fresh, and—and rather dazzling, you know. And well situated—that is, conveniently situated—for busy people who have to hurry off in the mornings," archly. "No long avenues; no turnings and windings; just drive in and drive out among the flower-beds. It did seem odd to hear Mrs. Carnforth running on about partridges."

"Oh, they have partridges. They keep turnip-fields on purpose. The Carnforths have more land than you would think hidden away behind. They make a great point of their shooting, and of having young men to the house for it; and their bags are fair—very fair. But as for the farm," with contempt, "the farm is in Mrs. Carnforth's imagination, if it is anywhere. They have a few cows, and a bit of a poultry-yard,—but that is all I ever heard of in the shape of a farm. Maybe the gardener has his house there; and there may be a piggery, for aught I know; but we have all that ourselves, without calling it 'a farm.'"

"Ah! that is because you never do call things by

fine names," said Monica, with animation. "You have solid substance without dishing it up in highly flavored sauce. From what I saw, and from what I guessed, while at those Carnforths, I take the farm with a grain of salt. Well, the next thing was the school. Do you suppose there is a school? Or does it consist of the gardener's daughter, and the pig's piggy-woman?"

They all laughed.

"There is a school, most likely," quoth Mr. Schofield sententiously, "but how much or how little Mrs. Carnforth has to do with it is another matter. No doubt she'll make the most of whatever finger she has in any pie."

"And the village," cried Monica merrily. "She was very great upon 'the village,' I must tell you. She gives prizes in 'the village;' prizes for the best kept 'village garden,' and the best cleaned 'village windows.' Somehow those few straggling cottages and that public-house by Batley Church—I had never thought of them as a 'village.' Uncle Schofield, what has Mrs. Carnforth in particular to do with Batley? It seemed to me that there were three or four large houses quite as close to the church, and inn, and turnpike, as the Carnforths'," and quite as important-looking."

"And so there are, my dear. And, for that matter, the Whites and the Conybeares own a vast deal more of Batley parish than the Carnforths do. I doubt if the Carnforths own more than half a dozen cottages or so. Oh, no; it's only the way they have got; they talk themselves into believing they are big people; and as nobody can exactly contradict them, they fancy it all goes down."

"How ridiculous!" said Bell, who had hitherto been content to listen. "I felt as if it were ridiculous at the time, Uncle Schofield. Now, at the Dorriens'——," and she paused.

"At the Dorriens' there was a different feeling in the air, eh?" rejoined her uncle, complacently. Ever since he had been at Cullingdon, had handed Lady Dorrien in to dinner, and had ridden off from the front door escorted by the son, and waving farewells to the father,

he had thought of those whom he had before denominated "a wild spendthrift set" with new feelings. It was now a delight to him to recognize the distinction betwixt the old blue blood and the mixture which sought to pass as such.

"To be sure, the Carnforths are a wonderful take in," he now proceeded reflectively. "When you see old Carnforth getting out at Batley station; bowing here and bowing there; so gracious to the station-master, and so civil to anybody and everybody who touches a hat—you would think he was lord of all the country-side. Manners? There's not a man in Liverpool can touch him in point of manners. He has pretty well *mannered* himself up into the position he has. He gets the best people to his house. If ever there is a political meeting, or anything of the kind to be held about here, the heads of it are always sure to be entertained by the Carnforths. Then he lays himself out for the young fellows, the sprigs of nobility who are cropping up in business now and again. *They* go to the Carnforths; they get shooting and billiards, and the best of good dinners, and wine. And the Miss Carnforths flirt with them—,"

"—Uncle Schofield, how wicked you are!"

"They have never flirted to any purpose, however," proceeded he, with high zest. "They have not enough money to afford a penniless 'honorable'; and though they are fine girls in their way, they have not looks to catch the elder brothers. Besides which, it is not the elder brothers who are to be met with hereabouts. It is only the lads; and, as I say, the lads are glad enough to go to the house, and to take all they can get. Oh, you will like to dine there. I have never been myself; it was not worth their while to ask me; but they will ask you fast enough. And you will have a pleasant evening, and music, and all the rest of it. They ask George Schofield now and again, he tells me. It is easy to see why they ask George. There are a lot of daughters, and George is not to be sneezed at. But they have never known the rest of The Grange folks; and I must say I am glad you are not going to mix yourselves up with The Grange folks for them to see. I was

glad you put a stop to that acting idea at the first." Monica and Isabel had met Daisy Schofield's proposition, it must be said with the curtest of negatives, and Dorrien had been empowered to convey the same. His own withdrawal had as a matter of course followed. And the project had suffered an instantaneous collapse.

"They say the place is too far off," continued Mr. Schofield with unabated enjoyment. "We'll see; we are further off; and if I am not very greatly mistaken," starting from his seat—"if my eyes don't deceive me, there is a groom riding in at the gate now, who looks uncommonly like a groom to have come from Carnforths'. 'Tis the Carnforths' groom, and he has an invitation in his pocket!"

In a few minutes the invitation came in.

"You are a wizard, uncle," said Monica, "a veritable wizard. It is for Tuesday next, and there is to be 'no party, but only a few shooting men,'"—reading the note with a smile. "But what is this?" suddenly; "they only invite Bell and me! There is no mention of you," to her uncle, "and do they think, do they suppose," anger flaming in her cheek, "that we are going to be treated like this? Asked to dine from *your* house and *you* not invited? What, I wonder, do they mean by such impertinence?"

"I daresay they have no room for me," replied her uncle quietly; though with an obvious endeavor not to betray some slight disappointment. "I am told they give out that they never have formal dinner parties; and though, in a sort of a way, I have known them all my life, and Carnforth is ready with his chat whenever we meet, and often walks up from the train with me, in preference to other people—it stops there. As I have never been to visit him in his own home, I daresay he thinks there is no need to begin now."

"Then he may do without us also," said Monica, walking to the desk with head in air. "Bell and I don't choose to be barely admitted to a house in this manner."

"Won't you go, my dear?" in surprise.

"Had we not better go, Monica?" chimed in Bell.

"I would not go for worlds. That I would not.

You are too good, Uncle Schofield; you never claim anything on your own account, and you let people pass you by."

"Oh, I don't mind," said he.

"But they need not think to get us;" the speaker stopped, a little ashamed.

"That's it, they think to get you," assented Mr. Schofield, perceiving perfectly all she had left unsaid. "They think to be friends with you, and show you off, and—and why not?" he broke off suddenly. "It will amuse you to go, and I confess I should like to hear about it afterwards;" and he moved a step or two nearer, and looked anxiously at her.

"We will *not* go," cried Monica, with a little stamp. "Uncle Schofield, when—when the Dorriens asked us, did they think that they also had been your neighbors for many years without having had you under their roof? Did they give that as a reason for still excluding you, even when we, your own visitors, your own nieces, were invited there? You know how differently they acted. Could anything have been more polite, more courteous than your invitation? Everything was arranged for you, and made easy for you, and——"

Mr. Schofield's quiet face gradually illuminated.

"They were very kind," he murmured. "Well, my dear, do as you please about the Carnforths, but if the Dorriens should ask you?"

Monica did not say what she would do if the Dorriens were to ask them.

CHAPTER XV.

A STRUGGLE FOR THE MASTERY.

> Then comes the anxious strife that prize to get:
> And then 'tis all he wants, and he must have it yet.—CRABBE.

THE invitation was declined, and the same afternoon brought Nemesis on the wings of the wind. The sisters had set out for a ramble, and were returning through the meadow, when their eyes simultaneously fell upon

a horseman turning in at the gate, and that horseman proved to be Dorrien.

Catching sight of them almost at the same instant of their perceiving him, he was out of the saddle in a moment, and, calling to a gardener to take his horse to the stables, was down the slope, and by Monica's side, ere the pair could advance many steps to meet him. The usual greetings interchanged. and a movement being made to continue the stroll, "I think I shall go in," observed Isabel, who had her own ideas, whatever Monica might choose to admit. "I wet my feet croosing the brook, and these wild flowers ought to be put in water at once. You won't stay long?" she added in a matter-of-course tone, for which Dorrien blessed her in his heart.

Bell and he were the best of friends. To others he invariably commended *her*, whilst dumb about her sister; and whenever able to detach his thoughts from the one theme, he was more ready to turn them in the direction of Monica's sister than of anyone or anything else.

In her present move he now saw a simple act gracefully performed, There was no need for others to follow because she felt herself obliged to take care of her health and her woodland treasures; and there was certainly no occasion for her to risk the well-being of either by remaining to form a third person of the party. As her light figure tripped up the slope he looked after it admiringly: he felt as if he could afford to look admiringly: and then he turned with a sense of joy to Monica.

And yet he had really nothing in particular to say to Monica, nothing but what could have been said with perfect ease and propriety in the presence of another. At first, indeed, it seemed as if he had absolutely nothing to say at all. He walked by her side, bent his head to inhale the fragrance of the blossoms she held towards him, indulged himself with a touch, a look now and again, and felt that life was full for the time being.

On a sudden, however, he wakened up. "I am to meet you at the Carnforths' on Tuesday, am I not?" he

said, as they turned to retrace their steps along the dell, having come to an end of the trimly kept path.

"At the Carnforths'?" repeated Monica. She had never thought of this. The name of Dorrien had never been mentioned to her by the Carnforths. "I did not know you knew them," subjoined she. "I—we—we have only just made their acquaintance ourselves."

"Oh, I have known them for long enough; I dine there whenever I am in this part of the world. It is the pleasantest house to go to about."

"But I did not know you went to any house 'about.'"

"That's my mother's nonsense. She does not go, neither does my father; but I go wherever I am asked. Of course I mean in reason. I——"

"You 'often wonder who lives in all the houses,' Mr. Dorrien?" archly.

"You will never forgive me that? But I am not going to explain. You understand; you understood at the time; you saw it all at a glance. I knew none of the Schofield set, consequently I had to pretend that there was no other set. I never dreamed that *you*——"

"Could belong to the Schofield set?"

"But then she took pity on him. He had been unfortunately placed, and his confusion of ideas, nay the very blunder from which he had started, was in itself flattery which merited forgiveness. She now held out the olive branch with kindness in her eyes "That little quarrel is worn out," she cried, gayly. "We must start another if we are to keep one on hand. But now about the houses and the people whom you really do go to hereabouts. You say there are some nice houses?"

"Oh, there are—lots!"

"And we have ourselves begun to find this out."

"Of course. They are only just beginning to fill. The people go off for July and August, but September always brings them home. There are the Rowlands——"

"Oh, do you know the Rowlands?"

"Rather. The Rowlands are the right sort. No humbug there. The Carnforths you know—but you will find out all about the Carnforths in time. I nearly got my mother to know the Rowlands once; but it fell

through. She won't have the Carnforths at any price."

"And you are going there on Tuesday?"

"*You* are, aren't you?" Something in her tone made him put the question quickly.

"Certainly not," replied Monica, who had now come to a decision in her own mind. "We were invited; but we have declined."

"Declined?"

"Shall I tell you why? We could have gone very well; we should have liked to go; but our uncle was not asked, and we do not choose to go to any house to which he is not admitted."

"Good gracious! Did the Carnforths do that?" exclaimed Dorrien, deeply disconcerted. "Of course that was—was awfully bad. Of course that was—was just like them. But, Miss Lavenham," eagerly, "they never meant it. It was only their stupidity; they are the stupidest people in some ways—(though, of course, they are supposed to be a clever family),"—in parenthesis, "and—and I am positive they never meant any harm. Couldn't you?" and he turned upon her an imploring eye.

"Can you suppose we could? We would not have our good, kind uncle slighted for the world."

"But they never thought of slighting him; they have never had any acquaintance with him, have they?"

"Never. Then for what cause," continued Monica, with an air that wonderfully became her, "should they seek ours? We did not want them. We could have done without them very well indeed. But they came over last week——"

"I know; the very day after they returned from Scotland."

"From their uncle's moor," proceeded Monica, with a wicked smile; "over they came, mother and daughters in full state. Isabel and I were out; but we found an array of cards on the table, *some* of which at least, it was to be supposed, were for our uncle. He was away from home, so we had to return the call without knowing anything further; and then, when a note came this morning, it appeared that he was not mentioned in it."

Dorrien was gloomily mute. He had accepted his own invitation with transports. It had been baited better than anyone but himself knew. "No party," thus the words ran, "only we have one or two people staying in the house. Captain Alverstoke and Mr. St. George are coming to shoot, and the Miss Lavenhams to dine." It had not been supposed that Dorrien would know anything about the Miss Lavenhams amid their present surroundings; but, as the young ladies had been out for a couple of seasons in London, there might have been former meetings, or at any rate hearsay recollections, which would be of use on the present occasion.

Dorrien, as we say, had accepted with trembling eagerness. It was not only that here was an unexpected, an absolutely unsought opportunity for being in Monica's company, but it was such an opportunity as would, he knew, be safely hedged in from any Schofield dangers.

He had been unable to resolve on any course of action with regard to Daisy Schofield; the truth being that he had, up to the date of his first appearance in these pages, gone almost as far as a man could go without absolutely putting the all-important question. He had solemnly assured both his parents of his intentions, and received their delighted assent and co-operation; he had paid court to Mrs. George Schofield openly and assiduously, after the fashion of a prospective son-in-law; and he had been rallied and congratulated by his friends. More than all the rest, he had partially satisfied his creditors with confidences and promises.

When alone, all of this would stand out to view in such bold relief, would so close round upon Dorrien and hem him in, as it were, that with a sigh and a puff of his cigar he would resign himself to his fate, inwardly exclaiming that such a poor devil as he had no choice, and that he was simply the victim of his forefathers' sins.

It was beastly bad luck that he should not be allowed to slip his head peacefully into the noose. He could have done that once. He really liked Daisy Schofield after an easy fashion. We know that he cantered home singing after spending a long lazy afternoon at The

Grange; and though, of course, he felt the atmosphere he breathed there to be different from that to which he was habituated, he had been enough about the world to make him able to endure it.

"Once away from her own people, this girl will do well enough," had been his philosophical reflection as well as his father's; but, as he was really rather a good-natured young fellow than otherwise, he had arranged in his own mind that he and Daisy would dine with the Schofield party at least once on every occasion of their visiting Cullingdon Manor. As for living at Cullingdon with such a wife, he did not see himself doing that at all. Little did poor old Sir Arthur know that a very different plan of life spread itself before his son's mental vision; and now it might have opened the infatuated Dorrien's eyes more than all besides, had he chosen to pry into his secret heart to find that, with another bride, he would have desired no other home than that of his childhood.

Dimly aware of this, he still struggled to play out the game. He would decide upon nothing, bring nothing to a point. Excuses were found wherewith to satisfy his father, and plausible inferences were carefully prepared for the Schofields; and time—only a little time, a few short weeks—was gained. Do not be too hard upon him, he really did not himself know to what depths his soul was stirred. He fancied the feeling would pass; would wear out, and expire. He had always heard that this kind of thing did not last; and that the more fiercely it burned for the time, the sooner would its strength be exhausted. Of Monica he thus thought:

"She does not care for me, not in the least. She only likes to be amused, and have some one to talk to. If I may only have her to myself now and then, so as to grow accustomed to her, and get to think little of her, I shall soon be all right for Daisy."

To accomplish this desired end, it was, however, so absolutely necessary to see Monica as often as possible, and to usurp her as much as possible, that such a chance of meeting on neutral ground as at the Carnforths' was not to be let pass; and it next became in-

stantly desirable to make certain of his prospective bliss. Fortune favoring him, he had caught the sisters alone, friendly, and out-of-doors. At first it had been almost too much; he had been dreamily satisfied with what the moment brought forth; but when, on rousing himself to inquire regarding the forthcoming festivity, he had been met by the simple statement of a fact which admitted, or almost admitted, of no expostulation, other emotions tied his tongue.

The thing was done; the overture had been rejected; and now, not only was he defrauded of a whole precious evening, but not improbably of several more! If Miss Lavenham had allowed to appear in her note the indignation which sparkled in her eye, most certainly no further dealings would come to pass betwixt the families. His only comfort was in recollecting that, when Sir Arthur had demurred to the necessity for inviting Mr. Schofield with his neices to Cullingdon, he had insisted upon his own view of the case, and had carried his point. What a chance it was that he had insisted! How should he have faced Monica now, if Sir Arthur had had his way?

"You see, we really had no option," said she.

He was obliged to see it with the best grace he could.

"Uncle Schofield tried to persuade us to go."

"Did he, indeed?" ("Sensible man," internally muttered Dorrien; "women are fools about etiquette, and such trash.").

"So it was not his doing. We should have pleased him better by going than by staying."

("And you would have pleased me also. Now, why could you not have pleased us both, instead of mounting this confounded high horse, which pleases nobody?") Young Dorrien rebelled in his heart, and this time he could not bring himself even to assent with his lips.

"I am afraid you think we have been tiresome," said Monica, sweetly. "Perhaps, if we had had time to consider, we might have thought as you do. If we had it to do over again——"

"—Who is that coming up the drive just now?" cried

Dorrien, interrupting her. "It is the Carnforths' groom. I know the man. He has come over again from their place. I swear he has! He has come with a message, with a note, or something. They have sent to ask your uncle now——"

"—Now?" exclaimed Monica. "Surely you cannot mean it? You cannot think it? *Now?*"

"Why not! Oh! I'll answer for it they have——," staring with eager eyes.

"You think they would dare?"

"Dare?" echoed Dorrien, confounded by her tone. "Why—what—I don't understand——"

"—And, dear me, how absurd we both are!" cried she, with a sudden recollection and a merry laugh. "You do not suppose I told Mrs. Carnforth the reason for our refusal, Mr. Dorrien? Oh, dear me! no; I merely 'regretted we should be engaged on the evening' for which they asked us; I would not say a 'prior engagement' because that would have been too civil, and I did not mean to be civil;—but I wrote as decidedly as I did vaguely."

"All the same, the man has stopped at the back door," said Dorrien, catching at a straw. "Do let us go up and see what has brought him," and without waiting for her consent, he almost ran up the slope.

Smiling to herself, Monica followed, just in time to witness an explosion of mirth betwixt the groom and footman over what was evidently a jest at the former's expense. The words, "You are a nice fellow, *you* are!" fell upon her ears, before her own sudden entrance upon the scene caused the necessary return to sobriety of demeanor.

The Carnforths' servant held a note in his hands, and with this missive the laughter and raillery were obviously connected.

"What is it, Thomas?" inquired Thomas's mistress with dignity, but nevertheless in quicker accents than were usual with her. "Is anything wrong?"

"It was a mistake of mine, miss," replied the horseman, touching his cap. "I could not find anywhere the note I was given to take back from here this morning. I fancied all day I had laid it down again, and I

could not be spared till now to come over to fetch it. I was just hearing that it had never been seen, when I put my hand in the saddle pocket, not thinking like, and here it was!"

A smothered exclamation broke from Dorrien.

"This is the note that Miss Lavenham wrote this morning?" he demanded, stepping forward.

"Yes, sir. Very sorry, sir—miss. It shall be delivered as soon as possible now, miss."

"Here, give it me; Miss Lavenham would like to have it back," said Dorrien, with a glance towards her. "Wait a few moments. There was something else Miss Lavenham wished to say; she is glad of the opportunity. Shan't keep you half a minute," hurrying his companion towards the house with an impetuosity that there was no resisting.

Twice Monica opened her lips to speak, and twice they closed again without emitting a syllable. On the one side of the question was not only pride, but conscience. Dorrien had never before shown so barefacedly the feelings by which he was actuated, and she was very well aware that they were feelings to which she had no right, and upon which she ought to have frowned. On the other hand, inclination prompted her to yield on every count, and inclination won the day.

The two entered the house. "Don't go into the drawing-room," whispered Dorrien. "Write here," pushing open the door of a little side room seldom used. "Here are writing things;" and he ranged them before her, and gently pressed her into a seat. Then he stood by, with his hand on the back of the chair. She could feel, she could almost hear his breath come and go, during the silence of the next few moments.

"Oh, I don't know, I really don't know!" Bewildered by being thus taken possession of, and having her own strong will subjected to such high-handed treatment, Monica felt an irresolution unusual with her. She flushed and stammered. "You see, Mr. Dorrien, I told my uncle——"

"—But you said he would be pleased to have you go."

"Still," and she felt herself blush anew, "he would wonder, he would be surprised."

"Not at all. In the morning, in the bustle and hurry of having to settle a thing off-hand, you took a fancy into your head, which I afterwards had the good-fortune to dispel. It was a perfectly unfounded fancy. You were under a complete misconception of the case. I give you my word for it—I am ready to swear it—that no omission was intended. You had not thought of that, and now that you have the chance of reconsidering your decision, without the Carnforths ever having the slightest idea that you have done so," and he pushed the paper under her hand.

At the same moment a step was heard coming through the hall.

"Do write *do*," whispered Dorrien, his tall form casting a deep shadow on the desk, as he bent over her in his urgency. She wrote: and when she had written, he thanked her in tones of which he ought to have been ashamed. Then he himself took the missive outside, and with his own hands gave it to the messenger, bidding him haste and begone.

"Where is the other, the note I wrote first? It had better be burnt," said Monica, somewhat shamefacedly turning things over on his return. "I am afraid Isabel will scold me for letting myself be argued out of my better judgment," she added, endeavoring to give a cool matter-of-fact color to a concession which she was conscious would scarcely bear the light of day. "You are responsible for this, Mr. Dorrien. You will have to bear the brunt of my uncle's astonishment. But I know why you have done it," she added rapidly, and without looking round, for she durst not face his smile, "it is because you fancy we are unfortunate in our present surroundings, and that we must be deplorably in need of a little change, a little society, ever so small a scrap of gayety. Is it not so? Am I not right?"

"Certainly. To be sure." He beamed acquiescence. He had gained his point, and was willing now to fall in with any view of the matter from any point. "It would really have been a pity to have knocked off so pleasant a house from your list. I am so glad I was

in time. And *what luck* it was altogether," exultation and triumph breaking through all barriers. "Oh, heavens, *what luck!*"

"But where is my other note?" said Monica, looking round. She did not wish it to fall into the hands of servants, to whom it might afford subject for conjecture, when coupled with the part Dorrien had played in its being cancelled.

"It is of no consequence, is it?" said he, indifferently. "You got it back, and that is the only point worth considering. Shall we join your sister now?"

But Monica was not going to yield upon every occasion.

"I put it down here, among these papers," she confidently asserted. "I know I did;" turning over torn scraps and loose sheets out of the blotting book. "It must be somewhere. One moment, Mr. Dorrien; I never like my letters to lie about. I must find it."

"It is not lying about," muttered Dorrien, under his breath. But he pretended to search also.

"How tiresome!" exclaimed Monica again. "How very tiresome!" with some petulance. "Are you sure you did not lift it? You were looking at it. Perhaps you put it by mistake into your pocket."

He had, by Jove! With an awkward laugh, meant to be perfectly natural and spontaneous, Dorrien drew forth the little document; and his companion, who had been up to that moment really unsuspecting, on a sudden perceived what had been done. She began to think that she was having a good deal of fun out of this Harry Dorrien.

Gravely he handed her the note: she received and tore it in shreds. Then they went into the drawing-room, and Bell was informed of the revolution which had taken place.

This was easily done. She had heard something, had guessed something, and was charmed with the whole.

Of course Mr. Dorrien knew best; of course they themselves knew nothing. Monica had been too hasty, she thought at the time that Monica had been too hasty, and really Mr. Dorrien's coming over and showing them

the matter in another light, was a special interposition on the part of providence.

Neither of her auditors quite knew how they felt beneath this. Other powers than Providence do occasionally meddle with the affairs of men and women, and though neither replied to the gay prattle, nor looked at one another, perhaps each was thinking the same thoughts.

CHAPTER XVI.

MR. SCHOFIELD'S THANKSGIVING.

A man will work his bones away
If but his wife will only play ;
He does not mind how much he's teased
So that his plague looks always pleased.—PATMORE.

"MONICA, you are really absurd!"

"Why am I absurd?"

"You pretend that you don't care for this Harry Dorrien ; you pretend that he doesn't care for you——"

—"I never pretended that he did not care for me."

"You can see that he is madly in love ; everytime he comes over, and he makes a pretext for coming every second day, he grows worse ; he worships the very ground you tread upon,"—

—"Oh, rubbish!"

"Rubbish! There is no rubbish about it. What is more, you don't think there is rubbish. I know your way ; you always look particularly cool and indifferent when you have raised a storm in somebody else ; and you never had on your cool, indifferent face more plainly than when you came in from the garden just now."

The sisters were alone, Dorrien having ridden off in the early dusk, when forced to admit that he durst linger no longer.

"Well," said Monica, calmly, "considering that I

have just allowed that it is possible the young man does care a little—a little more than he ought——"

"More than he ought? Oh, you are thinking of Daisy."

"Of course I am thinking of Daisy. The thought of Daisy inspires me——." She colored, laughed, and broke off short.

"Fie! Monica!" But Isabel also laughed, and that indulgently and sympathetically. "I know you are a naughty, mischievous creature," she went on. "And I must own that Daisy is fair game. She is so important, so confident, so altogether secure, and, what is more, I don't believe she cares for him."

"Yes, she does," said Monica, quietly. "That is to say, she cares as much as she can. She is so very busy, you know. She has all her practising to do; and her drawing society and her reading society to keep up with; and then she has so many friends, such numbers of friends." Isabel laughed again.

"So that Mr. Dorrien is only one among dozens of other things," pursued her sister. "He is only a part of a whole, and not a particularly important part: but still, she does care; she is fond of him; she—he—— Pshaw! The mischief is done:" petulantly. "It is done, and cannot be undone. He will never kneel at Daisy's shrine now, my dear Bell; he has found metal more attractive; while as for her, I think, I really think that she ought to be grateful to your humble servant for having opened everybody's eyes in time. If Mr. Dorrien had really cared for her, would he have ever done as he had done? Of course not. No man would be such a weathercock. He had merely thought she would *do*, and now he finds she won't do. *Voilà!*"

"*Après?*" said Bell smiling.

"*Après?* Oh! leave *après* to take care of itself. It entirely depends upon circumstances; and circumstances, my dear sister, are, like facts, stubborn things to deal with. I like this Harry Dorrien. He has given me something to do; something to think of. But I don't know about bolstering up his ragged old home."

"Monica!"

"That is what it amounts to. Oh, yes, Cullingdon

Manor is beautiful enough, picuresque enough; but it is dropping to pieces all the same. And then even if I did—did, you know—slip in front of poor little Daisy as one does at an Irish jig, and carry off this fine partner of hers before her very face, where, my dear Bell, where, I ask you, is a very necessary item of the business to come from?"

"What item?"

"Good Heavens, dear child, what a babe in arms you are! The money, you poor innocent; the pounds, shillings, and pence, you little simpleton. Who is going to find the wherewithal to rig up rotting old Cullingdon, if the next baronet lay it stone by stone at my feet?"

"How you talk! I wish you would not speak so contemptuously, Monica. You seemed so pleased with Cullingdon the day we were there, quite as much pleased and charmed as I was,—and now you turn against it, and abuse it."

"I am not abusing it, only those who owned it last, and who ought to have put it in repair, and did not. I am not even abusing Sir Arthur. It must have been 'going bad,' as Jenkinson would say, before his day. In a few more years it will be gone altogether. Mr. Dorrien," with a faint smile, "is quite right in thinking it is his duty to save his ancient demesne while he may."

"By marrying Daisy?"

"Or Daisy's cousin."

"Well?"

"Well?"

Each looked at the other. "If he is right, what do you mean?" said Isabel at last. "I never can understand you in this mood, Monica. You won't speak plainly. A few moments ago you sneered at Cullingdon—(though you were so taken with it at first,") in parenthesis,—"then you seemed to infer that Mr. Dorrien——," and she stopped inquiringly.

"I don't know that I 'inferred' about him at all. You taxed me roundly with his—his having succumbed to my charms. I own it looks as if he had. Then you want me to say that I on my part, have also suc-

cumbed. Whereas, I have done nothing of the sort. If Harry were to ask me to-morrow, I should probably say, 'No:' most certainly I should say 'No,' unless ——." She paused.

"Unless what?"

"Unless Uncle Schofield"—Monica's tone was prudently lowered—"unless he would undertake to make it worth my while. Do you understand? I very hugely doubt his undertaking anything of the kind. We have no claim upon him, Bell; we must never forget that we had grown to be quite as much at home with Uncle Lavenham, and *he* cast us off. Should Uncle Schofield cast us off too, we should be a couple of beggar girls to-morrow," slowly. "What would our own poor little allowance do for us! Hardly anything. Where would go all our easy life, our comforts, luxuries?"

"Ah—bah!" said Bell, fretfully. "What is the use of reminding me of them morning, noon, and night? I know all about them over and over. You will get on to the piano and the riding horses directly; and when 'good, kind uncle' appears upon the scene, I can stand no more."

The angry blood rushed to Monica's face. "You, ungrateful, heartless girl!" she exclaimed. "I am ashamed even to listen to you. It would serve you right to be turned adrift once more, with no 'good, kind uncle' in waiting this time. I do not believe you care—not one single jot—for anyone's feelings but your own——."

—"Humph! I care as much as other people do, I suppose." There was significance in the querulous retort.

"What do you mean?" demanded the other, with a fiery cheek.

"I mean that you, you who preach so finely, and are down on me so virtuously—pray whose feelings are *you* thinking of when you flirt with Harry Dorrien, though you don't mean to marry him, and keep quiet about it to Daisy Schofield, though you don't mean him to marry her?"

Without a word Monica walked from the room. It was

not the first time that the tables had been unexpectedly turned on her of late; Isabel had a certain provoking clearness of vision, which, when brought to bear within her own narrow range, could prove on occasion excessively disconcerting. She was not, as we know, a clever girl; she was not worldly-wise, nor philosophic, nor quick-witted as was Monica—but all the more it seemed she could be sharp in a small way. She had so little to think about, gave herself so few subjects for meditation, that all the powers she had would be concentrated upon any single point selected. This made it at times dangerous to quarrel with her.

It was especially dangerous at the present moment, but the feelings of Monica were not always within her own control. Another second and she might have said words which no after agonies could recall. She was absolutely startled to find what a shock Bell's words sent through her frame.

Hitherto she had not even to herself allowed that any scheme so ugly as that boldly delineated by her sister could have originated within her bosom. Dorrien had told her, Monica, that there was nothing between him and her cousin; wherefore, as she happened to know with very positive certainty that there was a great deal, he was bound to suffer for his falsehood.

He had lied beneath the witchery of her own charms. That was certainly in his favor; but since the spell had been found so potent, it must be allowed to fulfil its end, if only to save an unsuspecting girl from being entrapped into an unfortunate marriage.

As for Daisy—Daisy had been laughing-eyed and cock-a-hoop,—but she would do her a service all the same. She was not in the least fitted to be Lady Dorrien: Mrs. Schofield would be simply unendurable as Lady Dorrien's mama: and the sooner the whole family reverted to their original conditions the better.

But it never occurred to Monica that in the teeth of her fascinations Dorrien still designed to pursue his original plans; thus, we see, he and she were at cross purposes. She thought she had him fast; she had nothing of the kind, as yet.

Of course Isabel was penitent in the course of time.

To be at variance with Monica was so uncomfortable, so doleful, that from sheer love of ease, if from no other motive, she would have sought a reconciliation under any circumstances; whilst under the present ones, Monica's good-will was absolutely essential to her existence.

Mr. Schofield came and went, invariably the "good kind uncle" in Monica's estimation, the rich bachelor in Isabel's. But what was his presence to girls who had been accustomed to endless variety of companionship; who had, at least for several years past, been habituated to the newest chatter of Belgravian drawing-rooms, and the latest *on dit* of St. James's clubs? When the worthy gentleman made his re-appearance, which he did punctually to a minute or so, every evening, he had no idea of its being any part of the programme that he should amuse his nieces with Liverpool talk and news. He would have said that they would neither have cared for nor have understood the same. They did not know the people, how could they be interested in their doings? Evening papers were barely started in the north at the period we write of, and an evening paper did not enter into our merchant's calculations. He came out to his well-appointed, luxurious villa, tired, but not over-tired with his day's work, eager to leave it behind him, and to enter upon new topics, and fresh fields,—and any account, of his pigs and his poultry, his stables and his gardens, were music in his ears.

His elder niece having divined this, had usually some accounts to give. Bell used to wonder where her sister picked up so much knowledge as would be displayed at the dinner-table, now that the fading light of September made it desirable to sit down to the well-spread board, instead of going for the evening ride; Monica had invariably something amusing, bright, and lively to narrate during the meal: some comical sayings of old Jenkinson the gardener, for instance. Here was one:—

"I had a compliment to-day, Uncle Schofield; Jenkinson paid me a brilliant compliment, as I think you will own when you hear it. He had been complaining of the impossibility of accomplishing some desired feat, and all in a moment a happy thought struck me, which

I confided at once. What do you think was the result? He held his head on one side, rubbed it, took off his cap as in a sort of amazement, and finally exclaimed: 'Well, they do say two heads is better than one, if it be but *a sheep's head.*' A sheep's head! And yet I felt so flattered. My 'sheep's head' had suggested what he and all his men had never thought of; and he carried out the suggestion on the instant. Was not that something to be proud of?"

"Monica," her uncle had responded to this, "he has the sense to appreciate you. I shall think the better of Jenkinson hereafter."

During which talk Isabel would sit idly by, occasionally wondering how it was that all the amusing things happened to Monica, and none to her; but more often content to eat her dinner in peace, and wait for drawing-room conferences and conversation thereafter.

On the present occasion there was a great deal to be talked over, and quite a new subject to be opened up; so that Bell's *amende honorable* was made in a trice, and the sisters descended at the sound of the gong, on their customary good terms with each other.

Mr. Schofield was, as usual, in his easy-chair, all dressed for dinner, and not at all indifferent to its announcement. The ladies were often late, often had to rush down with pins and brooches omitted; aware that the calm figure which never offered rebuke or remonstrance, had been already some time patiently waiting; but on the evening in question, so engrossing had been other matters, that each delinquent's tongue was breathlessly apologetic, on finding that nearly a quarter of an hour had passed since the butler threw open the door.

"Do forgive us," pleaded Monica. "We really mean to reform, Uncle Schofield. I don't know how it is, we always *mean* to be in time."

"Oh, no matter, no matter, my dear."

"But it does matter, and it *shall not* happen," she rejoined, emphatically. "We must go up to dress sooner —that is all. Now that the evenings are beginning to close in, we shall not be tempted to stay so late out of

doors we shall come in and change our things, and sit down for a cosy read by the fire, as soon as there is a fire to read by."

"Have a fire as soon as you please, my dear."

"Very soon, then, uncle; but not till we really want it. There is certainly a briskness in the air, but I like it. It is delicious after the heat we have had, and the days are as fine as ever." It appeared to Isabel as if Monica had an object in discoursing at such length about the weather.

Presently the object came into sight.

"And had you anyone here to-day?" inquired Mr. Schofield.

"We had Mr. Dorrien." (Oho, you did not want to talk about Mr. Dorrien till the men were out of the room?" divined Bell. "You kept to the weather and such topics till they were disposed of, for the time being. I understand.")

"Mr. Dorrien rode over, uncle, to see if we were going to the Carnforths' on Tuesday," said Monica, in a clear, narrative tone. "It appears he knows the Carnforths very well, and says they would be perfectly shocked at the idea of having committed any rudeness in asking us there by ourselves. He thinks they must only have felt that they could not very well take the liberty of inviting you in this easy way for the first time."

"Yes, yes; oh, Dorrien is a sensible fellow; I was sure it was only that, too. I was sure the Carnforths meant no discourtesy," said Mr. Schofield, with an accent of relief, for in spite of his own judgment, he had been obliged to consider himself aggrieved under Monica's strong representations, and it was infinitely pleasanter not to feel aggrieved. "It is a pity," he now added. "I wish he had come before: I wish we had only known before."

"As it happened, he came in time after all," rejoined his niece, with rather a foolish laugh. "The Carnforths' groom had made some mistake, and left my note here after all. He only came for it at tea-time. So I—so we—we thought that perhaps we had better change what had been said, and— and——,"

—"And accept," chimed in her sister, promptly. "Mr. Dorrien's arguments carried so much weight——"

(Monica grave as a judge. Uncle Schofield perceptive and twinkling.)

"—That we both felt it impossible to hold out against him," proceeded the speaker merrily, "The truth was, uncle, that Monica and I were simply dying to go. Everyone says the Carnforths have a merry house. And though Monica was so very grand, and stately, and affronted this morning, as soon as she found that she could change her mind without abating her dignity, she was thankful enough to do it."

"And it was Dorrien who got you to go?"

"Oh, altogether! He is going himself. He says he always dines with the Carnforths when he is in this part of the world, and that there is not a better house to go to."

"They shall know that you went to Cullingdon, however," said Monica, addressing her uncle. "Sir Arthur and Lady Dorrien did not think it taking a liberty with you to invite you there in an easy way. No, my dear uncle, I am not deceived. These Carnforths only want Bell and me because they think we will do for their 'shooting-men,' and talk about London, and smart people, and all the rest of it. I know what they are up to. But we just won't; we will do nothing of the kind. We will talk about *you*, and *your home*, and *your* ways, and—and all you are to us——"

Mr. Schofield hastily took a mouthful of sherry.

"And *I* shall say you went to Cullingdon," added Bell, as though contracting to perform her part of an agreement.

It was not in human nature to resist being touched. It might perhaps have been in better taste to have ignored the supposed affront, and simply left Mr. Schofield out of the discussion; but somehow he had himself been so frank from the outset, that nothing but frankness was now possible.

They had therefore the pleasure of seeing him really more gratified by their partisanship than wounded by the occasion which called it forth. He was not a man

of many words, but his simple, "Thank ye, my dears," his gentle inclination of the head towards each, and his subsequent obvious pondering over a pleasant subject, told its own tale. In his heart Joseph was saying: "Thank the Lord for these two dear girls."

It is not often one meets with bachelor uncles who thank the Lord for perfectly friendless, almost penniless, and very expensive nieces.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOW TO ACCOMPLISH AN AIM IN LIFE.

> And hence one master-passion in the breast,
> Like Aaron's serpent, swallows up the rest.—POPE.

THE Carnforths' house was always comfortable. Taken at unawares, at odd intervals, at unfortunate moments— such a house had no unfortunate moments. In the dullest month of the year, at the earliest, darkest period of the day, at a time when it would have seemed as if Nature herself permitted slovenliness, and set an example of disorder, neither slovenly nor disorderly habits put forth so much as a shoot from beneath the wing of the Carnforth *régime*. Excuses were not known in the household. That which was ordained, was ordained; that which was the law, was the law of the Medes and Persians.

Now the key to the whole lay in a very simple fact. The master and mistress had but one end and aim in life, and that was to maintain themselves and their family in the position to which they had, by dint of much care and pains, attained. By means of continued and sustained effort, of tact, ability, patience, skill, and the outlay of a considerable amount of money, they had propelled themselves into a certain amount of prominence, but no one knew better than they did themselves that all previous toil and trouble, all the

energy and ability which had been required to obtain for them this coveted pedestal, would be thrown away unless it were upheld by the same hands which had originally formed it. It had no solid basis. Neither on one side nor on the other could the family lay claim to any sort of distinction; wherefore the social status which was aimed at by one and all might have been thought the last thing in the world capable of achievement.

But what cannot some people do? Those who knew Bingley Hall, at the date we first behold it, who beheld in their host the handsome, polished, urbane, elderly gentleman, and in their hostess the no less handsome, placid, and luxuriously attired elderly lady, would have seen little in them to recall the good-looking young couple who, thirty years before, set up their very modest housekeeping together. Those who remembered the Carnforths then, nevertheless, testified that even at that time a neater, trimmer, more compact little establishment never existed; and it accordingly may not be too much to say that it was this faculty for making the best of everything, as well as the most of everything, which primarily gained for the pair the success they coveted.

They had begun by being good-looking, clever, and thrifty; then fortune smiled upon them. People who would not have thought of taking any notice of Mr. and Mrs. Carnforth had they been ill-favored, ill-dressed, dowdyish, issued early invitations as soon as they discovered that their rooms would be ornamented thereby. Mrs. This and Mrs. That rather liked to make out that young Carnforth, being a "married man" and a "better sort of man"—(what they meant by the phrase they alone knew, for their husbands vehemently protested against any *betterness* whether as regarded business, or birth)—the dear creatures stuck to it, however,—that young Mr. Carnforth should have the honor of taking them in to dinner at their own houses; while the husbands themselves were quite as ready to look upon their right hands as the proper places for Carnforth's wife.

Everybody liked being introduced to the Carnforths.

Mrs. Carnforth's last gown from Worth's—she said it was from Worth's—was gazed upon with mingled envy and delight by the fair ones in their after-dinner retirement. In such request was she at balls, that in spite of vows and protests, (so she now would tell her daughters,) it was really quite shameful the way she had usurped the best partners long after her dancing days ought to have been over; and indeed the comely matron had been not a little inclined towards *embonpoint* ere the point had been decided; whilst Carnforth could take a turn with the best still, and he was sixty years old at the time we speak of.

So that scarce a door had been inaccessible to the handsome, agreeable, ornamental pair, as young married people. It is quite wonderful what looks will do at a certain period of life.

A fine moustache and military bearing would, however, have palled in time upon Carnforth's associates of both sexes, had these not been supported by something more substantial. Carnforth could talk like a sensible man, as well as look a gentleman. He was not only pleasing to behold, he was charming to sit beside or walk beside. He knew—what did he not know? He read the best authors whether in English or French—possibly rather more of the latter than the former. He deliberately selected from a periodical the scientific and literary articles for perusal. He was fond, genuinely fond, of poetry. He understood history. There was a man for you.

When we add that Mr. Carnforth was a thorough-paced man of the world, a shrewd man, a business man, a money-making and money-keeping man, we have said enough to furnish abundant cause for the steady progress upwards which year after year found him making. As we have said, he had become wealthy; but wealth was not his *ultima thule*. He desired it as a means to an end. To be a known man, a "somebody," a companion of "somebodies," this was his ambition.

Wife and children, sons and daughters, had been trained by himself. Each, from eldest to youngest, could be of use in the attainment of his life purpose.

The very little ones from earliest days had been taught to prattle out certain phrases, and to adopt certain beliefs. Mrs. Carnforth, as we know, was perfect in her *rôle* of country lady, in her superintendence of turkey chicks, and her hospitality towards "shooting-men." Her daughters, handsome and clever girls, kept up the ball with spirit. When with their own people, among the "right sort," who so lively, not to say uproarious, as they? Tongues like mill-clappers, laughter like mill-girls' laughter. In company which it pleased them to consider below their august selves, mum would be the word. George Schofield, who, barely admitted to Bingley Hall, occasionally had views of the sisters from both points, used to protest he never knew such queer customers. They never had much to say to George, but their father would not permit them to say nothing. The Schofield money was good money, and George Schofield would be the head of Schofield and Sons' one day.

To return to the Carnforth establishment. It was years since the prosperous merchant had taken possession of the handsome house in which he now dwelt; fields and meadows had been added to gardens and stabling; a cottage here and there had been purchased; lodges built; a wing to the mansion added; innumerable appliances and conveniences here and there inserted until at length, it had become one of the most commodious and convenient of all the many handsome and substantial residences about.

When so much has been said, however, there remains nothing to add further. There was no beauty, no antiquity. Monica Lavenham's sole reflection on leaving Bingley Hall for the first time had been that there was something incongruous in connecting the idea of such a place with partridges; her uncle's villa would have been as likely to suggest partridges to her mind.

And yet she owned to a perception of difference between Flodden Hall and Bingley Hall. This was owing to stage-management. Mr. Schofield, for instance, would never have alighted on the platform of his little station as Mr. Carnforth did on his, all smiles, acknowledgements, and condescension. He would never have

had in waiting a smart groom, jingling the reins of a blood-mare, in a high dog-cart; and he would never have seized the reins himself, and driven round several miles out of his way, in order to meet the sportsmen, and carry home the game,—dashing up with it to the door, and calling the ladies out of the drawing-room to show them what luck the day had brought. Before dinner—and you may be sure eight o'clock was the Bingley Hall dinner hour, though we are writing of a good many years ago, when hours were earlier—before dinner, billiards would be going on; also tea for the sportsmen in their own gun-room, or smoking-room; while in the library, shaded lamps and the brightest and most glowing of fires would invite the studious to peaceful perusal of the newest periodicals, with which the tables were invariably loaded.

Next, gong upon gong. You never heard gongs rolled out with more gloomy grandeur, rising to fury and madness, than at the Carnforths'.

For dinner full dress was an understood thing, whether there were guests or not. We do not mean to infer, dear young ladies, who read this, and are on the eve of incredulity, that everybody would be in the same kind of full dress on each occasion—oh, dear me! no; but have not such mamas and sisters, as are accustomed to being equipped fashionably, always some half-worn splendor which has to be burnt down, like a still smoking cinder, ere it be thrown out among the refuse? And have not papas and brothers also garments which are no longer equal to the full blaze of a thousand lights, but which look as nice as possible round the family dinner table? The Carnforths understood this kind of effect. It looked well; it paid; it kept the servants, as well as themselves, up to the mark. Hence no sins of commission or omission in the dress department would be condoned by those in authority, or attempted by those under it. For the same reason, the dinner would be always more or less profuse; the silver dark with a glorious shine, and the table napkins folded to look like new every evening. N. B.—We must here allow that it was upon this one point alone that Miss Grace Carnforth, who was vice-commander-

in-chief of the establishment, permitted herself not to see quite plainly. In theory she desired that there should be fresh napkins every evening—in practice she did not choose to observe that there were not, provided they were folded with adroitness. The Carnforths' laundry bill was already large enough.

In no other matters, great or small, would that lynx-eye relax, or that ready tongue spare.

But for Miss Grace, the sleek, full-fed, bloated figure-head of a *major domo* calculated that he might have spared one half the sum he had to lay out in the year upon coats and trowsers. "Morning shoes, too!" he would cry. He could not see, for the life of him, he couldn't, what odds it was to her, or to the governor either, if he were to be let alone to wear his old slippers of a morning. It was that dressing up of a morning that he did turn round against. It kind of upset him like. In many a house no one expected to see a butler till lunch time, and there was houses, too, where he wasn't needed to show up till afternoon-tea-time. He, Ricketts, was just about himself by the afternoon. He weren't fit for going about of a morning, he weren't.

With all his grumbles, however, the grumbler stayed on and on. The Carnforths' was a good place; it was no part of its master's policy to stint in wages, or in reasonable pickings. A number of young bachelors going backwards and forwards for a couple of nights at a time, rowdy enough and queer enough in their little games, wanting this and wanting that, and wanting nothing said about it, made Rickett's pockets dance to some tune, over and above the sly fun he had among them all. When he had had some unusually lively birds, and made his little profit thereby, he would forgive Miss Grace even for the compulsory regulation shoe in which he had to wait at the luncheon table.

If, then, this well-drilled and strictly superior household were never suffered to relax, if on sweltering summer days as well as on dingy winter ones all must invariably be harmonious and complete within and without, it may be imagined how peculiarly inspiring was the scene presented to the eyes of the expectant Miss

Lavenhams as they alighted from their uncle's carriage on a chilly, dull September evening, whose drifting clouds and drizzling rain would have made a drive not enlivened by cheering anticipations a somewhat dreary one.

They now found themselves within a large, central, Turkey-carpeted hall, not unlike in shape and solid surroundings their uncle's hall on a larger scale: but the resemblance stopped there. He had no rows of stands hung with hats and caps, coats and cloaks, plaids, shawls, waterproofs. He had no tables set out with rows of gloves—shooting gloves, driving gloves, boating gloves, even "gloves" proper. He had no trophies upon the walls, no heirlooms, no pictures which might be ancestors, and were at any rate relations. In short, Mr. Schofield's hall was bare and formal, lacking garniture, and that sort of orderly disarrangement with which a large family, well attended and looked after, provides a house. As the Miss Lavenhams slipped off their wraps, they took this in with native quickness of observation. "Even to the long logs of wood on the huge iron fireplace," said Bell, afterwards.

She did not know that those logs were among Mrs. Carnforth's stock in trade. Mrs. Carnforth's special gift lay in the countrifying department. She would not have her firewood cut too small, nor trimmed too neatly. At some great house where she had once visited, she had noted the size of the billets—billets no longer—and had had her fireplace built to order. Thus she could say, "We burn our own wood," with as easy a grace as "I have been down to the farm."

But besides the crackling and odorously puffing blaze, Monica and Isabel had to own that there were many nice things at the Carnforth's. The rooms were beautifully decorated, and appropriately furnished. They opened one out of another; and the lights were low, no purpose. A spaciousness and at the same time a cosiness was obtained thereby. People stood about where they chose, and dropped in and out as they chose. There was a delicious scent of flowers in all parts. There were large bowls of rose-leaves—Mrs. Carnforth

dried her own rose-leaves; she had just come in from gathering her last rose-leaves for the bowls the day the Miss Lavenhams had come over before, she now explained. She had a receipt for drying herbs and blossoms which had been written out for her by her grandmother—her dear old grandmother—a receipt which had been in their family for a hundred years—I am afraid Uncle Schofield had the whole of this over his coffee cup next morning, and enjoyed his coffee the more for the accompaniment); and, finally, when the miniature table had been displayed, and the ancient bureau inspected, and the magnificent, antique, leather screen duly appreciated, the young visitors severally confessed to themselves not only that the thing was well done, but that it was done even better than they had expected. Nothing to the most lynx-eyed inspection was wanting.

"And yet," said Monica, to herself, "between this and Cullingdon what a difference! Lady Dorrien never shows you her bureau; it never occurs to her that there is anything about it to show. *Her* miniatures are in old worn-out cases, here, there, and everywhere. Harry Dorrien does not even know which is which. He looked from one of them to me—I know what he thought. He will look at that one again. He will learn to whom *that* face belongs. Otherwise, a fig for the old folks who lived before him. But these Carnforths, they are all as elaborately up in 'my grand-aunt, this, and 'my grand-uncle' that, as if each old fogy had been a Tudor or a Plantagenet, instead of a Mr. Hurly or a Mrs. Burly! We can all go back to great-uncles and great-aunts, my dear Carnforthians. As for the screen, Mr. Carnforth had to own to the screen. He had picked it up at an old curiosity shop, and a very good place to pick from too,—but the screen at Cullingdon *grew* there. How finely it faded into the dim shades behind! How grand, composed, solemn, almost mournful, it looked! What a setting it made for Harry's head when he stood in front, stooping over the miniature! He—oh, here he is."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CARNFORTHS AT HOME.

That borrow their behavior from the great,
. . . . . and put on
The dauntless spirit of resolution.—SHAKESPEARE.

THERE he was; and she caught her breath, and then cried "Pooh!" and laughed at herself.

It was too silly, too entirely absurd, to feel such a sudden shoot in her veins, just because Mr. Harry Dorrien, who was, of course, to be there, and who ought to have been there before them, had at length made his appearance.

None of the young men had been down when the Miss Lavenhams were ushered in. There had been other strangers seated severally about; and these had been very distinctly named and presented; they were guests whom the Carnforths were pleased to name. But the flowers of the flock, the youth and beauty representatives of the collection, had been conspicuous by their absence.

Such delay was now explained. "Here come the laggards," cried Grace Carnforth, standing in a charming attitude against the light. "Better late than never." But they are later even than usual to-night. They will *not* go up to dress in time. Don't you find that is always the way with shooting-men, Miss Lavenham? They come in quite early—they can't shoot after six o'clock—and then they dawdle about, and play billiards, and smoke, and pretend they don't hear the dressing gong!"

All of this not only permitted Miss Lavenham to note that the four or five young men who were advancing in a group were sportsman, but that they were inti-

mates—that they could afford to disregard gongs and the like, whilst they smoked and played billiards,—so that when the fair speaker proceeded to explain that one of the delinquents was Captain Alverstoke, another was Mr. St. George, and a third was Mr Dorrien, she could feel that with the proverbial one stone she had killed quite a covey of birds instead of only two.

The fourth member of the quartet was her own brother; and as this brother had not before met the Miss Lavenhams, his introduction to them was the next thing.

Like the rest of his family, he was an admirably executed representation from a first-class original. With all the inherited ability which was his due, he had hit off his part; and though deficient in the personal bearing of the father, and by no means so clever as the mother, he had had the benefit of early training, and the use of models. Consequently much was to be expected; and, to do the young man justice, he himself realized this. He could not be Mr. Carnforth, but he could be Mr. Carnforth's son. Where the one could smile and sympathize, the other could smirk and simper: where mother and sister could remember and remind, could recall family seats and family connections, he could run off the names of smart fellows he had met. He had joined the militia; that made way for "our regiment," and "our regiment" again opened the gates for men with whom he "had been quartered."

In Liverpool Lionel Carnforth was supposed to be rather a fast young man; but perhaps he was not so fast as was thought. It was not his game to be fast—save with discretion. He desired to belong to the best clubs, to mix with the best society; he aspired to being seen at every good house to which it was something to get an invitation; to being allowed to hang on to a well-known coach with its well-known party at the Grand National, at Chester, at Tarporley, and at Hailwood Races; he was in the seventh heaven when allowed to make one of my Lord This, or my Lord That's shooting party on the occasion of a great battue.

As a purveyor of youth to Bingley Hall Lionel was, however, only a success in moderation. The acquain-

tances whom he brought there were, indeed, for the most part, well-born and well-bred; often, moreover, good-looking and agreeable. They would be lively, of course; it followed almost certainly that they would be lively; but Mr. Schofield had described them with intuitive accuracy as waifs and strays, who willingly went "for what they could get."

Under the circumstances, what men we may ask, would not have done the same? Neither Liverpool itself nor the adjacent country can be called prolific in affording variety of amusement. Who would debar the unfortunates whom Fate has cast thither for longer or shorter periods, from catching at any chance gleams which fall across their path? Lionel Carnforth was for ever falling across the path of some one or other of these eligible waifs—(eligible, that is, as a friend of his own and a frequenter of his paternal home); but—and here comes in the inevitable "but"—out of all those associates whom he had hitherto introduced, no single one had done more than come and go, shoot, dance, flirt, frolic, and depart.

Perhaps this may in some small degree account for the sharpness of Miss Carnforth's chin, and the dart of her eye; her younger sisters were growing up; she began to think it time that Lionel brought some other kind of men to the house.

On the present occasion Lionel had certainly brought some older men. Dorrien, as we know, was nearly thirty, and Captain Alverstoke, who lived several miles beyond Cullingdon, was possibly forty, certainly not far short of that age. He had come with Dorrien, and was, it appeared, on much the same terms with his hosts as Dorrien was. There were no family inquiries nor messages in either case. The two came to the Carnforths; young Carnforth went to them; there it ended.

That they should have been able to secure both guests to meet the Miss Lavenhams had been considered great luck by the givers of the present entertainment. The Miss Lavenhams would thus see that not only could the Carnforths import creditable acquaintances down to Bingley Hall, so as to form something of the necessary

"house-party" required to give flavor to an autumn gathering, but that they could summon the two eldest sons of the two principal neighboring county families—and that, in an easy fashion suggestive of frequent intercourse and long-standing intimacy.

It was delightful to the family eye to behold the unpunctual group straggle in, Dorrien's dark head above the rest, Alverstoke laughing over his shoulder to the next behind.

We have said that Monica Lavenham experienced a certain involuntary throb at the sight. Had she had time to think about it, doubtless she would have felt nothing of the kind, not being in love with Mr. Harry Dorrien, nor at all intending to become so; but she had insensibly suffered him to influence her actions; she had permitted herself to enjoy his torments beneath her satire; and she had not cared to shut out his image when in solitude it rose before her eyes.

Had my heroine been surrounded by all the environment of former times, it may be questioned whether Dorrien would ever have gained enough of her attention to have taught her that he was in any respect different from all the rest of her world; but he had been met with at a period when, cast down, dejected, and at times unutterably desolate, Monica was scarcely herself, and he had become—some one.

In the Carnforths' drawing-room a new stride was taken. It was not only that Harry looked handsome, striking, distinguished, not merely that he contrasted markedly with those by whom he was surrounded, (none of the other young men could compete with Dorrien in appearance), but that the knowledge of what lay beneath the surface, the recollection of those hungry and thirsty looks and breathless tones, to which alone her presence on the present occasion was due, invested every movement with significance. She could scarcely bring herself to meet his eye.

That was again absurd. Again she cried "Pooh!" in her heart, and looked boldly round, and the look was replied to on the instant.

It was but a flash of recognition. The next moment Dorrien was claiming the acquaintance of Mrs. Carn-

forth's principal lady visitor, a full-blown dame of quality, whose dowager title procured her several weeks' anchorage in this comfortable haven every autumn; while Monica was replying to Mr. Lionel Carnforth's bow, and wondering if he were to be her fate thereafter.

The idea did not exhilarate her: she saw through Lionel, as she had seen through his sisters, at a glance. Rather the other man, the jolly, red-faced, broad-shouldered laugher and talker, than he. Alverstoke? She had heard of these Alverstokes. Lady Mary Alverstoke, an aunt of this Lancashire family, had been at her aunt Fanny's; possibly this man had been at her aunt Fanny's too. She could not remember him; but, at any rate, the idea would do to begin upon, supposing —oh, he was to take Isabel, that was plain. He was being led up to Isabel at the moment.

Well, she must put up with the Carnforth creature. Of course she need not expect to have Dorrien. She looked at the three Miss Carnforths, laughed to herself, and shook her head. No, that would indeed be too much to expect.

But Harry might as well come up and speak to her. He had no occasion to linger by that distant sofa feigning not to have looked beyond it; and permitting himself to be usurped ere he had so much as shaken hands with the two whom he himself had brought thither. They had not told the Carnforths they knew him; it was for him to show that he knew them.

Isabel was thinking the same thoughts. A certain painful sense of inferiority had crept into the poor girls' breasts since their lot had been so strangely altered; and ideas which formerly would never have occurred to either were now continually thrusting forth their poisonous fangs.

"He ought to come up to us at once—*at once*;" Monica's proud spirit swelled within her.

"Can he be going to pretend he does not see us?" was the affrighted scare of the more timid Isabel.

Dorrien was simply afraid to go to them. He had been at the Grange the previous evening, and fancied thunder in the air in that region. Then his creditors

were beginning to threaten, and he had had a miserable hour after the post came in the same morning. He had nearly, very nearly resolved on throwing over the Carnforths, putting the all-important question to Daisy Schofield that very day, and never seeing Monica Lavenham again—which latter clause, we may add, must be taken at the reader's discretion.

No more tender looks, words, nor sighs, however. No more wanderings up and down the dell behind the garden, in the dusk. No meeting at Bingley Hall—no, confound it! *that* meeting could not be avoided: that dinner party absolutely must be attended. After all that had taken place, after all his entreaties, his urgency, his victory, he must at least keep the appointment.

But in future he would make no more such appointments. He would hold aloof from the very sight of Monica Lavenham. Since the witchery of her presence unmanned him, he must learn to distrust himself and flee temptation.

During such cogitations he had been rapidly looking over his accoutrements for the day's sport; ere any decision had been arrived at, he was well on his way to the meeting place, his portmanteau under the seat of the dog-cart.

Of course he thought no more, once the birds were rising, and the dogs working, and the jocund havoc begun among the turnip-fields. The day was rough and dull, but his spirits rose with every hour. When the light went, and homeward tramped the weary feet by hedge-row and stubble-border, who was the best company of them all? Who raised the song that set the others singing! Who leaped the stiles that crossed the little footpaths? Who told the story that made the audience laugh long and loud as they passed beneath the terrace windows? Dorrien was the life and soul of the party. He made them late for dinner, he was in such "form." St. George wondered how he had never known before that Harry Dorrien was such a jovial man; Lionel Carnforth sometimes broke out into great guffaws before Harry could open his lips, he thought him such a funny fellow.

Then when alone once more, the fever in the young

man's veins had died out, and he had sent, if the truth be told, to Mr. Ricketts for a mouthful of brandy—the which had somewhat surprised old Ricketts at that hour; especially as Mr. Dorrien, who was supposed to be a rather particularly sober gentleman, had partaken of tea like a good, well-behaved little boy when he first came in.

Harry's blood was in a ferment, and he was only too well aware of it. He felt as if he were about to commit himself one way or other, and cared not which. If only he did not need to speak to Monica, nor to look at her, nor—confound that Alverstoke! (Alverstoke was between Isabel and her sister),—the next minute Mr. Dorrien walked across the room, and took up position.

"I was just going to bring Mr. Dorrien up to you," said a voice on Monica's other side; "Mama hopes you will take Miss Lavenham in to dinner, Mr. Dorrien. We are going now. We are never formal," and Miss Carnforth, sweetly smiling, looked to Mr. St. George for his arm on her own account, and felt as if she had managed her little procession in a light-handed, airy manner, redolent of simplicity and high breeding. Such arrangements fell under her care. She had her own reasons for deciding upon this one.

To Dorrien no less than to Monica it came as a surprise. Neither had for a moment dreamed of any such good, or ill fortune. Each had alike felt it to be so improbable as almost to be impossible that they should be thus assorted: and so significant did the circumstance seem, not only in their eyes but in that of Isabel also, that the first thought of one and all was that some whisper had united the two names in common talk, and that this whisper had found its way to Bingley Hall.

A moment's consideration, however, dispelled the idea, and showed Dorrien in his natural place. Mrs. Carnforth had the parson of the parish—always available on such occasions,—Mr. Carnforth the dowager above named; the three daughters, severally Mr. St. George and two inferior youngsters, not good enough for their guests; while as for the brother, the brother

who might have been supposed to be the real rock ahead, nothing was more plainly evident than that he had made his own selection in the blonde daughter of the portly dame, whose train was now sweeping after her, in front of all, turning up the corners of rugs and mats as it trailed along.

A minute's reflection was all that was needed to master the situation.

Monica drew a long breath. Dorrien turned his face towards her. Each felt as if a momentary shock had been received ; and again, as if it had passed off harmlessly. She ventured to smile ; he to speak.

"I had not dared to hope for this," he said. They were passing through an antechamber, in narrow file, two and two, as the words were murmured ; the effect was as if they had been alone. Alas ! nought remained of the resolutions of the morning ; they had passed away as the morning dew !

Dorrien was now all eye, all ear for the one being present who had become the one being in all the world to him. Engrossed, absorbed in Monica, he forgot or neglected everything else. He ate because he was a healthy man and because the food was there ; but he knew very little about it. He hardly drank at all. A sort of loathing of wine possessed him. He was indulging in another species of intoxication.

But this is for our readers. It must not be supposed that there was any breach of *les convenances* on the part of either Mr. Dorrien or Miss Lavenham at the Carnforths' dinner table, or indeed that the ordinary spectator could have remarked anything beyond what was usual on such occasions. Dorrien was struck, attracted, attentive : Monica was soft, winning, and supremely lovely. A bright flush on the girl's cheek and a lustre in her eye enhanced her natural charms. She put forth no fresh ones. None were needed.

What did they talk about ?

It would be hard to say. Every subject chosen was commonplace enough, every discussion trivial enough to have passed between any pair of people present. She inquired about his sport—he about her music ? She had a tale to tell of misadventure—he one of escape.

They had been reading the same book; it was curious that he should have obtained it the very day after she had recommended it; and now they found they thought alike about this book. Monica contradicted herself flatly at one period—shall we confess why? It was to see if Dorrien would do the same. He did: she laughed at him; he laughed also; he had no shame.

In truth the poor wretch neither knew nor cared what he said, so long as he might say it. All he wanted or asked for was, to be yielded this hour of bliss, to be permitted to murmur in Monica's ear, to listen to her low replies, and to look into her face.

With a start he would be brought up now and again, however. One of the younger Miss Garnforths on his other side, either voluntarily or involuntarily blind to the state of affairs, refused, woman-like, to be thus trampled upon without turning.

"Are you not longing for the hunting season to begin, Mr. Dorrien?"

"I—ah—oh, it does not begin just yet, you know."

"I know, of course." (They all knew; it was their business to know; naturally Miss Ethel resented the imputation.) "I know, of course," she said, somewhat tartly; "I only asked if you were not longing for it?"

"Oh—I—I don't know," said he.

"Cub-hunting will begin next month, will it not?"

"Next month? What's next month?" half dreamily, half impatiently. How could he stop now to consider which was next month?

"Why, October," rejoined Ethel promptly. "We are more than half-way through September already. This is the 22nd, you know. I am sure some cub-hunting begins in October, for my sisters and I were stopping at a house last year where——"

—"Yes—oh—of course."

Dorrien's eye wandered round towards Monica's other side, to which an unknown, unimportant individual had somehow drifted, a nonentity which had now seized upon this his first opportunity for asserting his right to recognition.

("The devil take him!" muttered Harry, hot on the instant. "Confound his impudence!")

Prattle, prattle from Miss Ethel, bent upon making good her claim also. "We went with papa to inspect the stables, and some of the young horses in the paddock were brought round for us to see; and the stud groom said he had not had such a good lot together for many years. You see there are three packs of hounds now within reach, and——"

("Pon my word," fumed Dorrien, with angry contempt, "I must shut up this girl!") "I hate to talk about hunting till the time for it comes," he exclaimed, abruptly. "It is bad enough then, the way one's ears get dinned with the same old stuff year after year; it is nothing but kennel or stable from morning to night; but one might at least be spared it beforehand," and he looked straight into Tettie's amazed face, and then lifted his wine-glass to his lips and turned his head away.

Some men mind not what they say and are careless to whom they say it, once their blood is up. Dorrien, although in the main a good-humored fellow, had a temper which could not brook opposition, and which had never been broken in. Add to this he was in a house he despised; and add further that at the moment he despised himself. The very fact that he despised himself for what he was doing made him the more intolerant of let or hindrance that emanated from any other source. If he could not hold himself in, he would endure no other hand upon the rein. If he chose to be ruined for a girl's sake, no other girl should put forth her little finger to save him. As for Ethel Carnforth, he simply felt as if a noxious insect were irritating him and he must brush it off.

The luckless Tettie had accordingly nothing now for it but to sit in silence, and in renewed mortification of spirit.

She was, it must be told, especially unfortunate in her position at table. Nothing is more difficult, as every hostess knows, than to arrange a dinner-party so that every person present shall be rightly placed: and at informal gatherings, such as the present one at Bing-

ley Hall, no pains were, as a rule, taken in the matter, it being generally understood that the guests were quite clever enough to make good their own intentions on the subject, and rather preferred to be allowed to do as they chose, escape from whom they chose, and attach themselves where they chose.

On the present occasion the youngest Miss Carnforth had had her own will, wherefore she had now no one to blame but herself. She had airily informed her partner, who was not to her mind, that necessity obliged them to separate, and had sent him round to seek a shady nook in some obscure part of the opposite side of the table; she had then slipt into the niche between Harry Dorrien and her brother Lionel, just at the moment when Lionel was wondering whether two men would not need to sit together.

Ethel solved the problem for him. She had been delighted with herself for her adroitness; and had demurely awaited her turn, telling herself that Miss Lavenham, having been handed in to dinner by Dorrien, had to be sure a prior claim on his attention, and that she would be content to take a little less than her share, on the ground that she had no lawful claim at all.

How sorry was her plight now! Dorrien, neither ashamed of his rudeness nor attempting to redeem it, was haughtily staring across Monica at the young aspirant who, either unperceiving or undaunted, continued to chirrup; while, on the other hand, Ethel's brother, whose politeness did not extend towards taking any heed of a sister in adversity, was fully occupied with his own partner.

The result was that Tettie's indignation burned within her, and finally burst into a conflagration which threw a light upon much that might otherwise have escaped notice. By this illumination she made discoveries. First, she discovered that Mr. Dorrien's shoulder, the shoulder next herself, was very much more thrust forward than it had any occasion to be; this meant that Mr. Dorrien's face and form were considerably more turned towards his other neighbor than they need have been. Next, that while Harry spoke incessantly, (he had soon routed his foe and regained the field), he rpoke in

an undertone, this undertone being soft and exquisitely modulated; finally, that he never laughed.

Archy Alverstoke, on the other side of the way, was sending her sister Grace into fits of merriment every moment, while even the gentler Isabel Lavenham rippled charmingly in response to jests and badinage. Mr. Dorrien could be as gay as anybody. He had been noisy enough in all conscience when the sportsmen thundered up the back staircase, late and scrambling, to their rooms, before dinner. Dorrien's voice had been distinctly heard, as they went past the girl's apartments; and it had certainly been heard as evoking bursts of mirth, remonstrance, and retaliation. The girls had said to each other and to their blonde visitor that there never were such boys for making a noise in a house. But, it had been added, Mr. Dorrien and Mr. St. George were nice boys on the whole; and all boys were the same. They were the same at that delightful Irish house where Grace and Ethel had just been staying. Such a jolly house! Shockingly riotous, to be sure, but such fun!

The sounds of laughing and pushing and jostling had in reality been music to their ears when the jostlers were Alverstoke and Dorrien, and it had been felt that their guests, thus making themselves at home, to the extent of breach of discipline and decorum, was as it should be. But Dorrien, as he now sat at the dinner table, serious, absorbed, intent—Dorrien, brusque and inattentive on the one hand, enchained, impassioned on the other—this was not as it should be. Ethel Carnforth began to observe Dorrien.

CHAPTER XIX.

"DON'T DO IT, HARRY."

Oh, chance too frail, too frantic sweet,
To-morrow sees me at her feet!—C. PATMORE.

HARRY gave her plenty to observe. All through the evening which followed, he wore the same absorbed exalted, and yet chastened mien, the effect of Monica's spirit on his own. She played upon him at will; her stronger nature acted upon his, involuntarily; while even voluntarily—alas! voluntarily—no magnetism was withheld. We cannot defend her; he was less to blame than she.

"How those two did go it last night!" observed Lionel Carnforth, the following morning. "By Jove! Miss Lavenham knows a thing or two. I had no idea she and her sister would have been such acquisitions. I wonder if there is anything up, or if it is all moonshine, between the eldest one and Harry Dorrien. And, by Jove! there is a talk about him and one of the Schofield girls too; the one with the money. How would Miss Daisy Schofield have liked to see Harry last night, I wonder."

At the same time a somewhat similar query was being put in another quarter.

"Went the pace rather last night, Dorrien, my boy," quoth Captain Alverstoke, who was Dorrien's guest for the occasion, ere he departed from Cullingdon, after the next day's breakfast; he had previously abstained from making any remark on the point, for reasons of his own. "Anything serious, eh?"

A short answer, the purport of which was missed.

"All up with the little Schofield girl, then, I suppose," proceeded Alverstoke, leisurely. "Ya-as? You'll do better with a Lavenham, Harry. Good family, the

Lavenhams," slowly producing his cigar-case and matchbox.

"Look here," said Dorrien, suddenly. "Archie, you are a good fellow. I—I know you are a good fellow. Send round the dog-cart again. I want to talk to you." He looked away as he spoke, and a sort of convulsion passed over his face.

"All right." Captain Alverstoke lit his cigar, gave the order, and turned to his companion. "Where shall we go! Outside or in?"

"Anywhere," said Dorrien, hurriedly. "Out, perhaps; then we sha'n't be interrupted. Come along here," and he walked rapidly from the house.

"What is coming now?" quoth Alverstoke, to himself.

They had reached the end of the shrubbery and entered the wood beyond, before his companion's pace slackened. It was obvious that the interview was to be a long one, and, moreover, of an unreserved nature, intolerant of publicity. At length it began.

"Do you know," said Dorrien, with a motion as if impelled against his will to speak—"do you know what it is to have two distinct devils pulling you in two distinctly different directions at one and the same time? Did you ever hear of a man having that?"

"Well, no," said Alverstoke, his soft, slowly drawling accents dripping out, as it were, one word after another —"no, I should say not. When I was a boy we used to be told nice little stories about the good and the bad angel, and that sort of thing, eh? Ya-as? Always rather liked the bad angel; couldn't help it, you know; deuced good fellow: well?"

"There is no 'good angel' in my case," said Dorrien. "We don't deal in such articles hereabouts. But we have bad ones by the score—and they don't hit it off among themselves. If they could agree about me, for instance——"and he paused.

"Agree about you?"

"If they would let me do one thing or the other, I might get along; but it puts a fellow in an awkward position," forcing a laugh, "to be made sport of by two quarrelsome fiends."

"Quarrelling over you, are they?"

"Each wants me to do about as beastly a thing as can be done. Alverstoke,"—in another tone,—"you know what I mean. Speak out now, and tell me what you think."

"Is it about your marrying, Harry?"

"Of course."

"It is not then settled with the young lady you told me about?" prudently omitting the name.

"It is settled as nearly as it can be. I have gone as far as I can go, without asking her to be my wife in set terms; and now,——" and he turned away his head, while something that was almost a groan escaped his lips.

"And now," said Alverstoke—"now, you have, I suppose—for remember I can still only suppose—seen some reason for changing your mind. You have met with some one——"

"*Some one?*" almost shouted Dorrien. "Yes, some one. You know well enough who. You saw for yourself. Good Heavens! do not pretend ignorance. Anyone who was there last night—who saw us together,——"

"—Yes; I thought so." The quiet words seemed to sting the other to the quick.

"You 'thought so,' my good fellow? Don't suppose it was any credit to you to think so? I did not care who 'thought so'," passionately. "I tell you—but what is the use?" and his voice sank again. "I—I never was so——"

"—So what?"

"Happy or miserable—I don't know which. Both together. Before I went to the Carnforths' yesterday I looked upon myself as an engaged man, and I meant to behave accordingly. At least I think I did. Anyhow I meant to try. Now, I—can't. It is of no use. When I am with her, near her, I tell you what it is, I perfectly loathe the idea of the other. It is brutal to say it, but it is the truth. The thought of going there to-day as I had meant to do sends a shudder right through me. I can't rid myself of it. I——"

"Then, for Heaven's sake, don't make a fool of yourself, my boy."

"Make a fool of myself?" Dorrien stared vacantly.

"Strikes me you are piling up the agony a bit, ain't you?" proceeded his friend. "You have not behaved over well, I admit; but, if it comes to that, there are not very many among us who can cast the correct stone. All you have to do is to back out as quickly as you can; and don't imagine for a moment that your little heiress will be inconsolable. She must find some one else for herself, that's all."

"It is not only that," said Dorrien, with a sense of shame, "but the fact is that the little heiress, as you call her, is in a manner a necessity to me—an heiress of some sort is, anyhow; and really I had thought I liked her; I did like her—I like her still: if it could stop at liking we should get on very well, and all that sort of thing; and the governor nearly had a fit from delight—we have been fast friends ever since; the Schofields have been over here—my mother has called on them—everybody knows, they must know what it is for—oh, confound it! the net is round me on every side, and how to get out of it, Alverstoke, I don't know—sometimes I think I don't care. "The last words were uttered in a tone which demanded recognition.

"What do you owe?" said Alverstoke, abruptly.

"Three or four thou. It is nothing, of course; but I have not as many hundreds in the world. The allowance Sir Arthur gives me—well, he can't help it, but it's beggarly. That was why I left the Coldstreams. I couldn't stop in on that allowance. He thinks I am going to put it all right now, poor old fellow! I—upon my word I'm sorry for him."

"But I don't see," said Alverstoke, after a moment, "why there should be much of a disappointment anyway. Why should Miss Lavenham not have a fortune as well as Miss Schofield? They are relations——"

"—Only distant cousins."

"Never mind, what I mean is, the bachelor Schofield uncle is a rich man—I know Joseph, everyone knows Joseph, and an uncommon good sort Joseph is—well, is it not he who has adopted your Miss Lavenham?"

"My Miss Lavenham?" ejaculated Dorrien, wincing. He was in a humor to wince at a pin-prick.

"You know whom I mean. The Carnforths told me that he had adopted the sisters, and that they had come to settle down here."

"Even if he has," said Dorrien sadly, "I don't know—I don't see—of course he might settle upon her—but then if not—and, Alverstoke, if I once do it, if I once let myself go—I should not know where I was or how or what would happen next. I have nothing to offer but a paltry title, and barren family honors that no one would think worth the picking up. You know well enough about us. Everyone knows about us. How is it possible for me to go to a guardian and say, 'I am a suitor without a sixpence, but with a handsome halter of debts in lieu thereof; will you let me marry into your family?'"

"You proposed saying as much to the Schofields', however," observed Alverstroke, dryly.

"Pshaw! What did it matter to *them*? I only need to speak at any moment," and a smile curled his lip.

"Your vanity is insufferable, Dorrien. But come, I am glad to see you take things more rationally. Now tell me this: do you, with your present feelings, with the contempt you feel for these people, with your certainty of their caring only for your position and prospective title, and with your actual and positive preference for another, do you"—and his voice suddenly rose—"do you *dare* to insult that girl by asking her to be your wife?"

Dorrien started, and changed color.

"Dare!" he murmured confusedly. "I told you that I—that she—Alverstroke, you should not have said 'dare!'"

"I say it again. It would be a blackguardly thing to do. Stop, Harry," as Dorrien wrenched away the hand which had till then lain within his arm, "I don't say that you would be the blackguard to do it. You told me just now that you were torn in bits by the fiends who quarrelled over you. It is these fiends, or one of them, who has set you on to this piece of devilry." He paused, half closed the eyes which had been

opened wide, and added in his sleepiest drawl, "Don't do it, Harry."

A restive movement.

"All right. I know you will say you have as good as done it already—but you have not. You just stopped in time."

"Oh—'in time' what do you call 'in time?' I am in such a hole that I see no way out of it on either side."

"There is no very creditable way, certainly. You will have to eat humble pie, and you have the grace to be ashamed of yourself. That's as it should be, grace before meat, you know. But if you keep quiet for a little, slacken off at the one house, and don't go near the other,——"

"Which am I not to go near?"

"Miss Lavenham's of course. It would not be decent to be seen over there too soon and too often."

Dorrien laughed aloud.

"Why, I am going there to-day!" he said.

"You are going to——"

"To Flodden Hall. To Mr. Joseph Schofield's, to see Mr. Joseph Schofield's lovely niece. To—to——" and again he laughed defiantly.

"I don't see what there is to laugh at," observed Alverstroke.

"Don't you? I do. I see a lot. It's awfully funny to walk on the brink of a powder mill, don't you know? It is perfectly irresistible not to throw in a match. I never found anything half so amusing. So here goes for the match. Hurrah for the match! What the devil are you looking at me like that for, eh?" in another tone.

"If you must make a fool of yourself, Harry, I have got to help you I suppose," said Alverstroke, stroking his mustache.

"To help me!" Dorrien was sobered in an instant. "Did you," he pressed closer to his friend's side—"did you say to *help* me, Alverstoke?"

Alverstoke smiled.

"Good Heavens, Archie—if—if you are going to *help* me——"

"I suppose I have got to help you, my boy."

CHAPTER XX.

RIVALS.

If there's delight in love, 'tis when I see
That heart which others bleed for, bleed for me.
CONGREVE.

"AND now for Daisy Schofield," said Monica Lavenham to herself, that same morning about eleven o'clock. She had ordered round her horse, and she was going alone to The Grange.

"No, Bell, my dear, I don't want your company, so you will please not to want mine. You are not in a mood to ride to-day, and I am not in a mood to walk. Too much dissipation does not suit either of us. This morning I feel as if I had been out at a dozen balls, and had danced, danced, danced till the sun was up and spreading. I had such dreams," and a smile stole over her cheek.

"I think I can guess who figured in them," said Bell, astutely.

"Can you? How clever!" And Monica laughed a ringing laugh. "Would anyone else guess, think you? Would Daisy Schofield for instance? Daisy would like to hear about last night's dinner-party, Isabel. It is my solemn duty to tell Daisy about the party."

"It will be very cruel of you, if you do."

"Not at all. The cruelty would be in not telling. Somebody who shall be nameless is behaving in a very shabby manner to somebody else who shall be also nameless. Is it not only fair, kind and just to let that last somebody know?"

"Well—yes," conceded Bell, dubiously. "Yes, I suppose so. But still, supposing, Monica, only supposing that she cares for him, a little."

"She care for him? Nonsense," said Monica, with sudden asperity. "Do you suppose that a silly little vulgar chit of a Daisy Schofield could possibly appreciate—pshaw! I mean——"

"—You mean 'appreciate,'" nodded Bell, smiling. "I know perfectly well what you mean. You think because Daisy is rather an ordinary, insignificant girl——"

"Anybody would do for her, and she would do for anybody," scoffed Monica. "Mr. Dorrien" (no longer Harry) "is not much, he is not brilliant, he is not wildly intellectual, but he is—he is——"

"—Very agreeable to Miss Monica Lavenham."

"No; no, no; only passable; only just bearable. Somehow I rather like him. I like him in a way. There is something about him——"

"—Monica, Monica!"

"I am not going to give in to it, anyhow," said Monica, with resolution. "Mr. Dorrien shall see that. As he told me a lie, he had to smart for it; and it is some consolation to me in this desert isle on which we have been cast, that I have been enabled to punish a wicked man. Mr. Dorrien was undergoing part of his punishment last night, he shall have the rest to-day."

"*Monica!*" Bell bounded from her seat.

"Oh, yes, he is coming over this afternoon," said Monica, coolly. "He asked to come—in a whisper. He had no business to whisper. It was not his place to follow us into the hall, and fasten my cloak. Mr. Carnforth saw us to the carriage; we did not need Mr. Dorrien's assistance also."

"And yet you let him come over this afternoon?"

"Certainly I let him come. I particularly wished him to come. And that is why I am going out this morning. When I have seen Daisy Schofield, I shall be in the right kind of mood for Mr. Dorrien."

"Monica, what do you mean by all this?"

Monica paused and looked at her sister.

"What do I mean?" she said, to gain time.

"Yes; what do you mean? You are trying to blind me, as you are trying to blind all the rest, as I sometimes fancy you are trying to blind yourself. Why are you doing it? What do you mean by it?"

"Oh, I mean by it"—Monica was herself again—"only a little mischief, my dear. Mischief is the spice of life. 'Shake in sin to give it zest,' says the poet. If one had to be eternally good, how very stupid the world

would be! Now and then one really must break out, dear Bell. It is one of the laws of nature: witness volcanic eruptions, earthquakes——"

"—Oh, do be quiet, and answer me!"

"Nay, that's just what I cannot do. I cannot *both* be quiet and answer you. Not at one and the same time, my dear sister. To tell the truth, I doubt if I could satisfy you either way to-day."

"You are so flighty—so silly."

"So I am. Ta-ta! There is William with the horses. By the time I come home," kissing her sister's brow, "I shall have worked off both flightiness and silliness. A little talk with Daisy will be to me what 'letting blood' was in the olden time to feverish patients. I shall be cool, collected, myself, by—this afternoon." And she cantered off.

It was a dewy, fresh September morning, and the skylarks were mounting into the pure blue overhead from every field-path and hedge-row. Daisy Schofield had sauntered out among the dahlias and hollyhocks, under the pretence of gathering flowers to place within the rooms, but in reality to be alone and unmolested. The poor girl suffered much from the curiosity and conjecture of others at this period. Dorrien she knew no longer cared for her, and she also knew to whom was due the change which had within the past few weeks come over him. But no one else had discerned, no one else so much as suspected, anything amiss; and although she would have given much to have instilled into the minds of others an uneasiness and disquietude which might both have silenced remark and paved the way for disappointment, she could not do it.

The affair must run its course; she must bear her part in it; George must find out by slow degrees; Mrs. Schofield must be allowed to wonder and exclaim; the younger girls and boys must each be expected to have their word.

Well she would have to endure as best she might, as many another had done before her. It was a bitter prospect. She raised her eyes and beheld Monica—Monica, to whom she owed it all.

"Let me get off here, and walk about the garden with you," cried Monica, cheerily. "Such a lovely

morning! I have had such a delightful ride. What are you doing? Gathering flowers? How bright your flower-beds still are! Do look at the cobwebs on the wing! They are flying everywhere this morning, and they glitter in the sun like diamonds. Shall we come down this tangled path?"

Daisy assented, and they walked forward.

"We were at a dinner-party last night," her cousin chatted on—"such a jolly dinner-party—at the Carnforths'. Do you know the Carnforths? No, by the way, they said not. They had nobody from the neighborhood but ourselves and Mr. Dorrien—by the way, Mr. Dorrien can hardly be called 'from the neighborhood–' however, can he? Ten miles takes anyone out of a neighborhood—especially in this sort of country, overrun with houses."

"Was Mr. Dorrien there?"

"Very much there! He took me in to dinner. I had him all the evening too. What a flirt he is!"

"A flirt!"

"My dear Daisy, *you* to say that! I thought no one knew better than you what Mr. Dorrien was."

"I did not know he was a flirt."

"Good gracious! What did you think he was, then?"

"A true man."

"My dear child, you have hit the nail upon the exact head," replied Monica, merrily. "Mr. Dorrien is emphatically a true man, wherefore he is a flirt. Likewise every true woman is a flirt. I am a flirt; you are a flirt——"

"I am not. You may be. But I don't think Mr. Dorrien is," in a curious tone which to Monica's ear was fresh cause for mirth.

"If you had seen him last night, my dear," replied the latter, with gay, significant emphasis—"oh, I wish you had seen him last night!"

"If I had seen him last night," replied her cousin, turning slowly to look at the brilliant face beside her, "I should not have have altered my mind."

"You think not? Daisy—I—I should like to open your eyes.'"

"Open them. It will do no harm, now."

"Do you think that Harry Dorrien is in love with you?"

The answer came in a low, clear voice, "No,"

Obviously it was not that which had been expected.

"No? But," said Monica, slightly discomfited, "but I thought—I understood—Bell understood—you certainly told Bell that he—that you—that he had given you reason to suppose he was."

"Perhaps I did," a slight flush on the cheek. "I did think so once, I do not now."

"There, that is what I mean; he is a flirt."

"He is not a flirt; he never cared for me, but he wished to marry me."

"Why, that is what I thought, Daisy; and I often wished to warn you in case you imagined otherwise; but I felt that unless I could give you some grounds for it——" She paused.

"And now you have the grounds?"

Monica began to respect her companion. There was a calm dignity in the young girl's bearing which was every moment becoming more and more apparent. To the above inquiry, so steadily, simply made, it was difficult to find an answer.

"I am afraid I have," she replied at length, in some confusion; "I—I hardly know how to say it. But if you had been with us at the Carnforths' last night, you would have seen for yourself that what I said before is the truth. Mr. Dorrien loves to amuse himself, and—and—I amuse him now more than you do."

"You are wrong, cousin." Monica happening to glance downwards perceived that the two small bare hands, Daisy's pretty hands of which her mother was so vain, were holding each other fast, as the speaker paused to take breath. Then she went on. "Mr. Dorrien never amused himself with me; he is not now amusing himself with you. He tried to love me, he *does* love you; that is all."

Not a tear, not a sigh escaped. The words fell stonily upon the ear.

For a few minutes their effect was such as utterly to confound their hearer. Monica had pictured a scene so totally different that she neither knew which way to look, nor what tone to adopt. Twice she opened her

lips to essay some refutation, some argument, but twice the attempt died away; and as the two had now reached the end of the little path they were traversing, they stood side by side gazing into the fields beyond, without a word, the silence becoming every instant more oppressive.

At last Monica spoke.

"Daisy," she said—in spite of every effort the voice was not quite her own—"do you blame me?"

"I do not blame anyone. No one is to blame."

"No one? Not Mr. Dorrien? Nor—nor——" stammering.

"Nor you," said Daisy, calmly. "He saw you; was it likely he should ever think again of me?"

"But—but——," every moment Monica's astonishment deepened, while the blush of self-conviction dyed her cheek—"but, dear Daisy, I—oh, how shall I explain?"

"You do not need to explain, Monica. I have explained it all to myself. Long ago I saw it. I have known it—can you guess since when?"

"No," faltered Monica, a fresh suffusion on her brow. "No, I cannot guess. I had no idea even now."

"No; you thought because we are rough, homely people, people without fine manners and knowledge of the world, that we—that we have no pride, that we would let our feelings be seen by all who pass by."

"No, no, no; not that."

"That, at all events, *you* would see them," said Daisy, with a half smile. "That is why you came to-day. You imagined that I perceived nothing of the change in Mr. Dorrien, and that you would be the first to inform me of your conquest; was it not so?"

Monica was silent, crimson.

"He turned from me the very first moment that he met you," continued her companion, in the same deliberate accents. "He tried to hide it; and the day we were at your house I let him try, because I did not choose to have those who were present remarking and conjecturing,—but I knew in my heart he neither listened to me nor noticed me. He was following your every movement. We went over to Cullingdon; we went, for we had to return Lady Dorrien's call, and I

had no choice but to allow Mr. Dorrien to go on as he had been doing, Indeed, once or twice I almost thought, I half hoped—but never mind. That other day, the day when you were there, would have betrayed him to anyone."

Monica hung her head.

"You saw all this, and yet——?"

"And yet—what? What could I do? What can I do now. I receive Mr. Dorrien as I always did. If I altered my reception of him, or my manner towards him, he would immediately guess the truth, and do you think I could bear *that*?"

"But he had given you cause to—to expect——?"

Daisy held up her head quickly. "He had not asked me to marry him; until a man does that no womn should show he has given her cause to expect anything."

"My dear Daisy!"

"That is what I think, Monica. It may not be what some people, what fashionable people, think: I know nothing about those sort of people. But I should never, never—if I died for it"—her voice strengthened,—"show a man that I—I expected anything of him until he offered it to me."

Again her auditor was silent from amazement. Could this be Daisy Schofield? Could this clear utterance, with its ring of resolution, its steadfastness, its quiet expression of a power and force within, proceed from her hitherto despised and neglected cousin? What womanliness, what nobility! Every after-thought was swallowed up in the sense of wonder, almost of awe, with which she regarded the new creature that moment by moment was dawning upon her vision. This Daisy? *Daisy?* She felt bewildered, overwhelmed. She could not speak—could hardly think.

At length Daisy herself renewed the conversation. "Monica, I am sorry it has been you, because from the first you never cared for me, and it will make it the harder to bear for—for the rest of us."

"Make what the harder?" muttered Monica, passing her hand over her forehead. She felt as if she were in a dream.

"Your marrying Mr. Dorrien."

"My marrying Mr. Dorrien? I—you—Daisy, are you mad? What made you think of my marrying Mr. Dorrien?"

"Why should you not, Monica?"

"I would not marry him if he were at my feet to-morrow."

"He will be at your feet to-day."

Oh, if she could only have denied it! Monica bit her lip till the blood came. "Look here," she cried, passionately. "Look here, and listen to me. I am not sure that we understand each other. You suppose that I—pah! I am ashamed to suggest it—that I knowing what Harry Dorrien is, how he has behaved, all that will be said of him—that I—that he—that we—that he has only to speak, to have me fall into his arms? That he has but to turn from you to me, to win one of us, each with equal ease—you or I—it matters not which? The thing is preposterous—outrageous," walking rapidly on.

"I do not think that the thing is either preposterous or outrageous," replied her cousin, with some emphasis, "if he loves you—if you love him."

"I tell you it is outrageous. Is he to get his own way in everything? Is he to make you a laughing-stock——"

"Nay," said Daisy, with gentle dignity, "I am no laughing-stock."

"You are the best, the noblest girl!" burst forth Monica, with an impetuosity she could not restrain. "You are—I cannot tell you what you are, nor what I think of you. You see your lover enticed away, beguiled from your side, yourself shamefully deserted; you see in me a victorious rival, a triumphant, disdainful, merciless rival—and all you say and all you think of is that he and I should be happy together. I tell you we shall *not* be happy thus. That man shall *not* have the reward he hopes for. He does not deserve it—I do not deserve it—both of us——," she could not articulate more.

A hand took hold of hers.

"Dear Monica, I think I shall love you now," said Daisy.

"Good Heavens! And this is the girl he might have

won, and did not think worth the winning!" cried Monica, almost beside herself with remorse and burning mortification. "Daisy, listen to me. I did tempt him. I did allow myself to please him. When I saw, as you did, as who could help seeing, that he was beginning to like me, to care for me—instead of checking him and looking coldly upon him, I threw myself in his way, and—and allowed the rest. I thought—for I will tell the whole truth about this shameful affair—that you did not really understand, nor—what shall I say? I do not mean appreciate, but some word of the kind—Mr. Dorrien's character. He is a curious man; I did not fancy there could be much sympathy between you. You may believe me or not——"

"Of course I believe you, Monica."

"But now—but now," continued Monica, her rapid steps keeping pace with her rapid utterance, "you cannot suppose I should be so miserably imprudent as to let this folly go any further. It has been already bad enough. I have done that which will degrade me in my own eyes for the rest of my life. If I had known sooner——" in broken sentences, "if I had not been so utterly blind—blinded by my own vanity, my pride, my—oh, what a fool I have been!—what a fool I have been!" She tossed aside a spray, and wrenched it in two as she spoke. A tumult was raging within her bosom.

Nor was she altogether alone in her emotion. It is true that her earlier perception of the truth had enabled Daisy to display, and even to experience, a calmness and self-control which had placed her on a level above her companion at the beginning of the interview. The unconscious dignity of her demeanor, and her deliberate, unimpassioned speech, had done her infinite service in Monica's eyes, prepared as they had been for jealous discomfiture and possible reproach,—but young as she was, she would have been less than a woman had such a scene not made her falter.

Not only had her lover, the man who had taught her to love him—nay, taught her the very nature of love itself—been allured from her side by this beautiful, triumphant creature here present, but, strange to say, she too could have loved Monica had Monica willed it.

Monica had for her a strange attraction. She had already done more than justice to her cousin's beauty and brilliance; she had noted the fine nature underlying all the accumulation of evil piled upon the surface. No little trait of sisterly generosity nor of unselfishness had been lost upon Daisy. No trace of tenderness, nor of sweetness, such as would now and again peep out from beneath an exterior overlaid with heartless maxims and designs, had passed unobserved. She had yearned for a word or look of notice. Monica's disdainful indifference had been felt to her heart's core.

And now here was Monica humbled, shamed, and penitent before her. A tear, which nothing else had brought to her eye, gathered and hung upon the lash. Unwilling to take out a handkerchief, she put up her finger to steal it away, but Monica saw the finger. It touched her more than would have done the loosing of a flood.

In a another moment her arms were round Daisy's neck, and a storm of passionate self-reproaches were being poured into her cousin's ear. For some minutes neither could speak coherently, possibly neither heard what the other said.

At length, "Let us sit down here," said Daisy, indicating a little arbor hidden in a sequestered nook, "and talk—that is if you will talk—dear cousin, freely. I am sure you love me now, and I think I have always loved you. It will make us both the happier, it will, I hope, make *you* quite happy, if we understand each other. No one will then be able to interfere with us, and no one will dare to try to make mischief between us Shall we talk, Monica?"

Of course they talked. The sun rose high in the heavens and found the two still there, still engrossed, absorbed, regardless of time, hand in hand, lip fervently meeting lip. It was to Monica the revelation of another life.

"I must go," she said at length, when warned by unmistakable signs of the lateness of the hour. "I *must* go, but"—and her fingers once more closed upon the hand she held—"but I could have stayed here, with you, dear Daisy, all day. I—it is so wonderful to me. You cannot tell, you will never know, what I have

learned to feel this morning. No one ever spoke to me as you have spoken. No one ever showed me my own pitiful, mean, narrow, worthless self as you have shown it. No, don't shrink from my saying so; I know it was not your meaning to do anything of the kind; but—well, no matter. You shall teach me more than this, you dear, sweet, humble, little floweret. Now I know why you are called Daisy. You are the sweetest Daisy——"

"—Please don't flatter me, Monica," but it was a fond and grateful face that looked up into the face above. "See, there is your groom and the horses. They must have sent him to look for us. Oh, here is another messenger! Monica, dear, one word more before you go; you will not mind? It is about Mr. Dorrien."

"What about him, Daisy?" Monica glanced furtively round, the very name seemed contraband.

"If there should be no obstacle, I mean if he has enough to offer, or if—if anything else should make it easy for him, you would——?"

Monica made no answer.

"Promise," whispered Daisy, holding her back, as she was walking on. "Promise."

And at last the promise came.

CHAPTER XXI.

A HINT IN TIME.

Defer not till to-morrow to be wise;
To-morrow's sun to thee may never rise.—CONGREVE.

AFTER such a morning who could be cool and composed?

Monica flew home on the wings of the wind, but she neither marked the ground beneath her feet, nor the sky above her head. When she had passed the same way a few hours before, she had had eyes for every glittering cobweb and bespangled hedge-row; now eyes, ears, all were absorbed in one thought, one retrospect.

She was still in a maze of bewilderment, giddy, dazed.

Bit by bit she pieced together the whole of the strange interview which had been so different to all it should have been, till she would feel one moment as though even the top of her horse's speed were scarce swift enough to keep pace with her impatience to enlighten as she had been herself enlightened, and again would almost shrink from the sight of Isabel's astonishment and incredulity.

It was, however, some comfort to recollect that Bell had always said her sister did Daisy less than justice. Many a time had Monica, as she well knew, disregarded the gentle protest which her sister would vainly attempt to slip in, when The Grange was under discussion. Bell had endeavored to discriminate, Monica would hear of no discrimination. Ultimately Bell had learned to take Monica's view.

Well, she must take the new view, that was all. It would be tiresome to explain, tiresome and something more,—there being but little hope of opening all at once eyes which had, as it were, been born blind; and the vision which had been that morning spread before Monica's own astonished gaze had been one beneath which every heart-string had thrilled and vibrated. But she would do her best with her sister. And at any rate she could always by tone and eye daunt Bell. Failing every other argument, sheer force of will had ever been held by this masterful girl in reserve, and if necessary, she told herself, it should not be wanting on the present occasion.

Underlying all was the memory of her promise.

It was late when she reached home, and luncheon, she was informed, was proceeding; but, being in a hurry to dismount and run into the dining-room, she did not catch a communication which followed. It was accordingly a surprise, and at such a moment, if the truth be told, not an altogether agreeable one, to find her uncle seated at the table with her sister. He had never returned home at that hour before; what had possessed him to choose such a day for the innovation? Perhaps he wanted an afternoon ride; and, if so, would Bell, who had complained of headache in the morning, wish her sister to go out again, taking the other horse?

There was a visitor expected who would not be well

pleased with such an arrangement; and with the whole of this train of thought flashing through her mind in the brief instant of her perceiving Mr. Schofield discussing his cutlet and tomatoes, Monica had some ado to check the first expression of her countenance, as well as to change the pure astonishment of her, "*You* here?" into a note of congratulation and rejoicing.

"I'm here," replied her uncle, happily unconscious. "Here I am; and a very pleasant change I find it from where I usually am. That uncomfortable feeling has quite passed off, Isabel, my dear. I had a sort of dizziness and ringing in my ears when I went in to Liverpool this morning, Monica; though I said nothing about it to disturb either of you, for I knew it was only stomach, so would wear off; but I just got a quiet prescription from my own chemist, and he said I might as well go out early, and take it easy for a day or two. No bad idea. I'll take my holiday this way, maybe. I told him I had had no holiday to speak of this year. I explained how it was that I had been kept to my work later in the year than usual, without getting away. I have had but a week since Easter. A week is nothing—not but that I shall enjoy my holiday at home as much or more than if we had gone to Scarborough,"—hastily, as he fancied he read in their faces that the sisters were conscience-stricken, "it will do me every bit as much good, and it will be a novelty, a perfect novelty. I have never had a holiday at home before."

"I am very sorry you should need it, dear uncle," said Monica tranquilly. "But I am sure Bell and I will do our best to make it agreeable to you." All the time she could not help thinking he had chosen rather an unfortunate time to be always about, and at home.

"My dear, you *always* make it agreeable. There is no occasion for you to 'do your best,'" said Mr. Schofield, the pride and admiration with which he habitually regarded his nieces infusing itself into his tone. "But for you," he added, smilingly shaking his head, "I don't know that I should have been so easy to manage in this matter. But, thought I, I must take care of myself for their sakes. The longer I live, the better it will be for my poor dear Annie's children," and he looked

from one to the other tenderly, while they almost fancied a tremor in the gaze.

The same thought occurred to each, namely, that they had never heard him so speak of their mother before. Also Monica fancied—it might have been a mere fancy—but she felt as if, when listening to the softly uttered words, she beheld in the speaker an old man. She had never thought of her uncle Schofield as an old man. She was almost sure that he had not looked old before. Was it that she had been indifferent, unobserving all round, hitherto? Or was it that there really was some sort of change?

By a sudden impulse she found herself at his side, and the next moment had stooped and kissed his forehead. He caught her hand as she turned away. Then she was sure that his voice did tremble. "Thank you, my dear," he said. "Thank you—thank you. You will find that I am not ungrateful."

"Ungrateful? Oh, uncle!" from both.

"Monica," continued her uncle, still holding her hand so as to prevent her moving from his side, "when you have finished here, would you give me your company for half-an-hour or so? I partly came out—that is to say—yes," after a moment's reflection, "I did partly come out in order to have a little talk, a little business talk, with you. Nothing very serious, my dear," seeing that she became grave, and even inclined to be apprehensive. "Nothing to alarm you. I don't fancy you will object to anything I have to say, nor yet will Bell. I ask to speak to you alone, Monica, because I take it that we should be more at our ease, just the two of us, than if there was a third party. Bell will not think me rude——"

"—Oh, *dear*, no uncle." Infinite relief and emphasis on Bell's part.

"And though it concerns her as much, or very nearly as much, as you, Monica," proceeded her uncle, shaking kindly the hand he held, "well, she need not be bothered with any more than she likes, if *you* understand. Is that right, Monica?"

Monica felt as if every mouthful would choke her after this. What was coming? What was she to prepare for? What to guard against? Surely she had had enough

already for one day without this, and without something which might be in store presently. The day was yet young, and she had already undergone one great revulsion of feeling ; was she to be wrung and strained anew? And then—and then—another thought sent her back into the bygone evening, and awoke again its slumbering echoes and pulsations. Supposing that Dorrien were coming, as who could say he was not coming, to—to—how should she meet him? How restrain him?

How tell him the cold, prudent, bitter truth? It had been easy enough to picture herself saying anything, behaving with any kind of cruel propriety, and mocking her lover by every sort of feminine home-thrust when contemplating the scene in her mind's eye, as with jocund, devil-may-care spirits she had set the world at defiance that merry morn; but it was a different Monica who now alike dreaded and hung upon the coming interview.

Supposing, only supposing, she durst allow herself to care for Dorrien? Heretofore, to do her so much justice, she had steadily stamped down the idea whenever it arose in her heart. Stoutly she had maintained to her own conscience that she was but serving rightly a false pretender and double-faced lover. She had hardly intended, indeed, to let him get as far as he had done, but as to entering into an engagement, as to thinking of marriage—pride and prudence alike forbade the supposition. Pride had now been softened; every unkind, unworthy thought in regard to Daisy Schofield had been melted and fused into a glow of tenderest endearment, and she had promised Daisy that she would, at least, be just to Dorrien.

He had been more sinned against than sinning, wherefore she would torture him no longer, but—and to her infinite surprise she found herself murmuring "but" with a sigh. She felt a little pity even for her own self, in that something could never happen which until that morning she had not supposed she could have willed to happen. To cut short enigmas, it was useless to think of Dorrien, and she had only just discovered that but for the uselessness she might have thought of him.

"Shall we stop in, or come out, my dear?" said Mr.

Schofield, who was in waiting as his niece descended to the hall at the expiry of an hour. "You have taken off your habit, but you are warmly enough dressed," eying a smart autumn tweed, which even to his inexperienced sight was infinitely becoming to the wearer. "What about boots? Oh, shoes? But those fine shoes, are they thick enough? The paths get a little chill beneath the feet at this season; my feet have been cold all day. If you would really rather come out, I can wait while you change?"

She disclaimed the idea, she had put on thick out-door shoes on purpose. Her garden hat was in the hall, and they passed out through the garden door.

Mr. Schofield walked with a brisk step. Obviously he had recovered from the musing mood which had been preceptible at the luncheon table, and was once more his usual cheerful self. He was even more chatty and genial than usual. It seemed to Monica, who was unable to emulate such composure, as if he voluntarily lingered here and there, exchanged a word with gardeners whom he might have passed, and paused to examine work which might have waited, in order to prolong a pleasurable moment—the moment being to her fraught with nervous anxiety and disquietude. It was a relief, although it made her internally start and shake, when he at length opened the real object of the interview.

"My dear Monica—ahem! I am going to talk to you—ahem! ahem! as if I were your father. I consider that I am now in the position of your father." Here Mr. Schofield paused, the paternal strain not being his *forte*; and moreover, having had no practice in it, he considered that it might now be dispensed with. Then he started afresh. "To tell the truth, Monica, I have been thinking about you and your sister for some time past. Your poor mother was my only sister, and you are her only children." Here the speaker paused again.

Monica listened in silence.

"I should wish—I should like—I intend to do for you girls as if you were my own," burst forth Mr. Schofield suddenly. "There, my dear, that is what I want to say, and what I wish you to understand."

"My dear uncle!"

Great as was the importance of the news—and its consequence to herself and to her sister could, as Monica well knew, scarcely be over-estimated—the first thought which arose in her heart was an odd one. It was nothing more nor less than this: "But why, in the world, did you take the trouble of coming out to tell me this at mid-day, when in the evening would have done as well, supposing I were to be told at all?"

"My dear uncle!" was, however, all she said.

"Aye, that is about it," proceeded Joseph, in his homely phraseology, having disburdened himself of the worst at one throw, "that is the long and short of it, though there are a few details which I think it may be as well for you to know; so now, if you please," with an obvious intention of checking any response on her part, "now, if you please, we will go into them."

"But, dear uncle, let me say one word."

"Oh, you shall say your word, my dear—you shall say your word. Naturally you would like to tell me you are pleased. I am sure you are pleased, and I am heartily glad of it; but you had best let me run on a bit first, and then you will know what to be pleased at. I am a fairly rich man, Monica."

"Yes, uncle," softly.

"I can make you and Bell very comfortable—ve-ry comfortable," proceeded he. "If I live some years longer, you will come in for very considerable fortunes, for the money is well invested, and as secure as I can make it. My eggs are in a good many baskets; and anyhow there's a middling penny in Consols. But that is not what I daresay you care most to hear—though you are a sensible girl, Monica, and can understand the value of good investments as well as anybody,—but what I fancy you will care the most about is this," and his voice dropped to an impressive undertone. "If necessary"—he paused, thought in his kind heart, "I will not look at her," then resumed—"if required, I can make a very handsome marriage settlement on—on my sister's eldest daughter."

The hot blood rushed to Monica's brow. Now in an instant she saw it all. Now she perceived why such a communication had brooked of no delay. She had early

perceived that the name of Dorrien invariably produced a satisfaction and exhilaration in her uncle's demeanor which plainly denoted that he was not averse to the young man in the light of a suitor; but, worldly-wise and versed in the ways of a selfish world, Monica had laid but little stress on such a circumstance.

Her uncle might not object to an alliance with an impoverished family. He might very well say—as a matter of fact she had supposed he would say, were he spoken to on the point—"I give my consent to your marrying my niece, provided you are able to support her suitably," and accordingly she had resolved that he should not be spoken to. Should Dorrien have the presumption—but, no, he could not have the presumption. Should he be so infatuated—but he must not be allowed to be so infatuated.

Her mind had been in a whirl, and through it all she had allowed the so-called friendship to creep stealthily on. Now, wonder of wonders, what was her uncle saying? What had Daisy Schofield said? She tried to piece the two together: to surmise if any words or hints could have passed between them; to cogitate whether Dorrien himself could have accosted her uncle? The ground seemed to recede from beneath her feet.

"Oh, my dear, you must not take amiss the plain speaking of an old man." Strangely sounded the words in her ear. "You are not angry with me, Monica?" a new concern infusing itself into her uncle's accents.

"Angry? Oh, my dear sir—my dear, kind, *kind* friend!" both hands clung to his arm; "it is only that I do not know what words to use, nor how to use them," said Monica, in a full voice, for indeed her throat was swelling with the effort to repress emotion. "It is so much too much—so infinitely more than we deserve. No one has ever loved us and cared for us as you do; and you speak as if—as if *we*—what are we? We have no claim on you, no right to come upon you for anything. We only came because no one else would have us,—no one wanted us.——"

"—Never mind—never mind," pressing her arm kindly.

"To think that you should be such a friend, such a more than father," proceeded Monica, with overflowing

heart. "Our own father never cared for us; the little we might have had he threw away and wasted. It is to his selfishness we owe our present dependence on the charity of relations, whom he——"

"Well, well. Well, but he was your father, you know," hinted Joseph, with old-fashioned notions on such a subject. "After all, he was your father, whatever he was, Monica."

"Uncle Lavenham threw us off directly we grew to be incumbrances," proceeded Monica, with rising excitement and disregard of all beside. "Even when we were under his roof, he grudged the expense to which we put him, and the trouble we gave him. We don't mean to give trouble. Poor Bell and I try to please——" Her lip shook.

Mr. Schofield gulped down something in his own throat.

"I am very glad we have had this little talk," he said as soon as he could speak; "very glad indeed. Now you know how I feel, and we shall be very happy together, and no need for more words about the matter. You are just to be my daughters, and that means it all. Only if—you know—*if*—ahem!—if anything should happen—if anybody *should* come—such things do occur," smiling benevolently, "wanting to take one of my daughters from me, you will know what to tell him. So I thought," concluded the speaker, with an air of elaborate unconcern, "I thought I had better just give you the hint, Monica."

CHAPTER XXII.

AN UNKIND MOMENT.

Forever, Fortune, wilt thou prove
An unrelenting foe to love;
And, when we meet a mutual heart,
Come in between and bid us part?—THOMSON.

WHO had given him the hint?

That he had had a tolerably broad one was plain to the densest vision; that he had hurried home hot-foot

in case young Dorrien should be there before him was the explanation which made all the day's proceeding clear.

But why had he considered such haste necessary? He had known, for no one had ever concealed it from him, that there had been comings and goings—almost daily comings and goings—between his house and Dorrien's house; that his nieces had lunched and called at Cullingdon, and that Lady Dorrien's highswung and old-fashioned barouche—a relic of better times—had been seen now and again at his own door. Perhaps he had not been told quite all the number of occasions on which a solitary rider had found his way alone thither, on some trifling pretext scarce worthy the name of an excuse, but he had known enough to have made further knowledge a matter of course.

Up to the present hour he had, however, given no sign, and it was this silence which led Monica to conclude he intended to give none. Passive consent, not active assistance, would be the utmost either sister might reasonably expect in the event of suitors arising.

For once her shrewd foresight had been at fault. Bred in an atmosphere of calculating selfishness, she had drunk in suspicion and distrust with every breath, and suspicion and distrust might have been left on the threshold of Joseph Schofield house. "You see, my dear Bell," Prudence was wont to observe, "it is easy to be pleasant. Almost everybody can be pleasant who tries. Of course people are often shamefully rude; and as for some of aunt Fanny's friends, they were perfectly atrocious to each other; but girls of our age are sweeter tempered. Only don't expect anything more of them. I do not know a single human being who would give up a fancy, or sacrifice a pleasure, to save either you or me from perishing;" which was, perhaps, rather a strong mode of expression, and a sweeping condemnation; but it expressed the habitual view with which her own observation, joined to Colonel Lavenham's teaching, had taught this young girl to regard the world she lived in.

Plunged from that world into another, she naturally measured the inhabitants of the latter by the standard of the former. Her new guardian had been generosity

and beneficence itself; he had outstripped in kind consideration every other relation with whom the sisters had ever had to do; he had not only provided for their wants, he had created wants on their behalf; nothing they had desired of him but was supplied instantly, willingly, and, as it seemed, with pleasure at being so entreated. Their trifling attentions, their most ordinary deference to his wishes, (Colonel Lavenham had been solicitous to impress on both that such deference was imperative), all of this seemed to good Joseph gratuitous on their part. It inspired him with new affection; and accordingly, "He is really fond of us," quoth Monica, in some of her sisterly conferences, "He is. I am sure I don't know why: it must be his own goodness which makes him look on us in the light he does."

"Oh, I don't know," rejoined Isabel, one day. It seemed to her that they had not quite come to that. "Some people may like us—a little," she added, not seeing the force of such extreme humility.

"Of course they *may*, but they never *do*," replied Monica, who was in one of her moods. "We are not the kind that are liked. We are admired, adored, envied, hated—we might be loved——" she paused.

"Might be loved! I should think we might!" resentful indignation in the other's voice.

"But yet we never have been so," continued Monica, steadily, "And I can tell you why: it is because we, on our part, have never learned to love. I think I could love——"

"—Uncle Schofield?"

"Uncle Schofield. It is not only for what he is to us, and what he does for us. I could love him—I do already love him for what he is *in himself*. Bell, I think I shall begin to look out for people who in themselves are good and true. I believe there are some such people to be found. Uncle Schofield is one; he is my first; that makes a beginning; now let us see who will be the next."

But, all the same, it would not do to let her imagination carry her too far; and when Mr. Dorrien began to usurp a great deal more of her thoughts and day dreams than he had any right to do, Monica simply allowed him a little extra latitude, whether absent

or present in the flesh, because of the seeming impossibility of the present leading to anything further in the future. It was rather nice to sit, and look, and listen, and linger, and yield herself to unrecognized love-making which would have to be dashed to pieces if once recognized; the very thread upon which it hung lent to it a charm. Its uncertainty, its unlawfulness, and its apparent hopelessness combined to invest it with a sort of glamour. She had not been at all convinced that she wanted Dorrien, but she had been perfectly aware that she could not have him.

Now she was told in a few distinct words that she could have him.

He, and none other, had been meant by her uncle's imaginary suitor; and even Daisy's renunciation, couched, as it had been, in thought and speech which would not have soiled an angel's wing, had not, in point of fact, opened the door, as Mr. Schofield's more practical assurances had done.

Are our readers curious to know what had stirred up the good uncle? A little bit of malice, the malice of a little bit of a mind. Miss Ethel Carnfield, it may be remembered, had been set on the watch by the heedlessness of an imprudent guest, who ran all risks for the sake of an hour or two in Paradise. In the neglected Ethel's bosom anger raged. Moreover, she fancied that her own partner, slighted in his turn by her, was beholding with vengeful glee her discomfited and desolate condition from his own obscurity. He could see that she was perforce silent during the whole, or nearly the whole, of the meal; and this was the last drop in her cup of mortification.

Afterwards she had sought out the young man, and thus addressed him: "We are a good-natured family, are we not, Mr. Smith? Of course you see why Mr. Dorrien and Miss Lavenham have been asked here together. But I was unlucky in being placed next him, and Mr. Wilkins was unlucky in being next her. We had each to endure in silence. One should always do as one would be done by, however; and we shall be able to say that the match was made up at our house."

"Oh, indeed!" said young Smith, accepting the overture.

Then he went home and tattled. Papa Smith went up in the train next morning with Joseph Schofield. The two put their heads together. Subsequently Mr. Schofield considered that his little touch of dizziness, and the ringing in his ears whereof he complained to his friend the chemist, was almost an intervention on the part of Providence to give him an excuse for getting home before any more had been heard of Dorrien. It had leaked out at breakfast that Dorrien was coming in the afternoon, and he now thought he knew what the young man was coming for.

About the middle of the afternoon Harry came, fresh, it will be remembered, from his confidential interview with Captain Alverstoke.

Archie had been in his way a friend. He had given good advice and he had offered a handsome loan. It had been a morning of surprises to all the principal persons concerned in our little story, not the least of these being that which Dorrien had received on being voluntarily offered aid which he had never dreamed of asking. Alverstoke was wealthy; but wealthy men are not more eager to lend money than are their poorer neighbors; and perhaps, to tell the truth, at another time no such offer might have been contemplated.

But it chanced that Captain Alverstoke was especially "flush"; moreover, that he had a soft corner in his heart. He had once been in love—deeply and truly in love—and the affair had not prospered. It had left him a bachelor—a jolly, open-hearted, easy-going, and on the whole well-contented bachelor; but it had left him also one faint, faded gleam of heaven opened. He had seen a reflex of that gleam on Dorrien's brow on the previous evening; it had roused an old, old feeling within; it had stirred a storehouse of dim sensations; and in the night he had dreamed a dream.

The confidence of the following morning, and the self-betrayal into which Dorrien had been beguiled, further worked upon his tender mood. He felt an ineffable pity for this poor fellow whom a few thousands would save.

It seemed a shame.

It had ended in this. If Dorrien could square up other matters, could win his love and her uncle's money,

Alverstoke would advance enough to set him free of debt, and could be repaid at leisure.

Dorrien had felt as if prison bars were falling apart before his eyes. I fear he did not think much about Daisy Schofield; he shared Monica's opinion on that subject; add to which, the hope, the tangible, reasonable hope of actually possessing his soul's mistress rendered him indifferent towards every other consideration. About Monica herself he could not feel any real anxiety. She had, it must be owned, given him but little cause for it; and he was hardly to blame if he felt that it was only coming to an understanding with his father, and all was his own. He had been so jubilant, so grateful, so incoherent and wild, so perfectly and radiantly happy, that the friendly Alverstoke had been half sad in the midst of his generosity, half envious of the joy he had himself occasioned.

Then Sir Arthur had been sought out and informed with some confusion, but with clearness upon the only points he really cared about, of the change between his prospective daughters-in-law. He had looked a little crestfallen at first, but as of late he had been taken up rather shortly upon the subject, and had been sharply informed that matters were not so ripe as he thought, with more of the kind, he was so overjoyed to find that the time for action had arrived, even though it were to be action in a different direction from that which had been anticipated, that he was ready again with his "God bless you, my boy, go in an win," and with his cogitations as to how much of the Schofield money could be made to flow out over the Dorrien land, the moment his son's views were fully placed before him.

All thus arranged, Dorrien with a light heart galloped westward, and the red sun shone into his eyes as he turned in at the gates of Flodden Hall.

He looked eagerly about, but Monica was nowhere to be seen. She had been out since daybreak, and had passed through strange vicissitudes of feeling during the intermediate hours. In consequence, she was by this time tired both bodily and mentally, and had gone within doors and settled herself in the drawing-room, where a blaze sparkling at one extremity and a Sep-

tember sun illuminating the other, combined to make all as cheerful and attractive as heart could desire. Isabel was also there.

"Shall I stay?" the latter had inquired, and been told she was certainly to stay. "Unless—unless—" Monica had faltered and blushed a little. "I hardly think—I don't expect—I don't wish to be alone,—that is to say, I would not for the world prepare to be alone, —I——"

"Oh, I understand." A smile on the speaker's lips.

"But pray, *pray* be careful," Monica had whispered in an agony, as a glimpse of an approaching horseman warned her that another great moment of her life was approaching. "Don't go, Bell; dear Bell, *don't* go. I don't think you must go at all. No, Bell, don't go at all. Recollect," in a tremulous whisper as the doorbell pealed, "not *at all*—unless——."

"Unless," whispered Bell back, with a kiss. "Oh, I know what that 'Unless' means."

She was charmed to see the alteration in Monica. Enough had been told her—though in vague terms, and with many warnings—to make her understand something of what was going on; and now, if her sister could only become Lady Dorrien in prospect, and spend most of her time at Cullingdon, and have a town house, and—and—Monica had implored her to be silent.

Monica's feeling was, that even with all that had been done to smooth her path, it was still, and ought still to be, beset with thorns. She could not bear to see Bell triumphant and joyous; her uncle's decorous satisfaction was a prick to her conscience; and she scarcely knew whether she ought not even at this hour to deny and defy Dorrien. She was shaking with agitation as he entered the room.

Happily for him, Dorrien never was one to offend at such a moment. He had intuitive perceptions which were never at fault; add to which he had at the present juncture his own soul-absorbing passion to render him serious in the presence of her who induced it. It was never with Monica that he laughed and sang. At an earlier period of their intercourse he might have done so, but then his spirits had been weighted by another consciousness; and though subsequently this oppres-

sion had been thrust aside, it had only given place to new and not less over-mastering emotions.

It was, therefore, with scarce any disturbance that the little party re-seated themselves on the entrance of the new-comer, and tea was handed to the rest by Isabel.

Monica sat in a broad, low armchair by the fire, the rosy flush of the autumnal sun just tipping her head as she leaned it against the cushion, and falling in a streak over the pretty dress whose warm tints her uncle had admired. She owned to being fatigued ; she had had a morning ride and an afternoon walk : and then Mr. Schofield's early return was descanted upon, and the cause, the ostensible cause explained.

" He has gone down to the station now, " said Monica. " He said he should go down to meet some friend who comes out by this five-o'clock train, who will bring his letters, and also take in word that he is not going to his office to-morrow morning. You see how clever we have become, Mr. Dorrien. We know all about our uncle's doings now, and are quite habituated to his going in every day after breakfast, and coming out before dinner. It would really seem strange to have no fresh arrival at dinner-time ; no one to expect at six o'clock, bringing out odds and ends and parcels. Uncle Schofield brings out all sorts of parcels. Whatever Bell and I want from Liverpool we ask him to bring. He never minds. He goes and shops for us, and shops a great deal better than we ourselves should do. And he brings us such presents ! If he can think of nothing else, he brings chocolate and French bonbons. Look at that box by you. But the other day he produced a parcel, and what should it contain but strips of the most magnificent embroidery ! It was lovely, and in such good taste too. We shall feel quite at a loss during this week, when six o'clock comes and brings with it no *fresh* uncle Schofield, only the uncle Schofield we have had all day," and she laughed a little ; then suddenly, and, it seemed to Dorrien, with infinite grace and sweetness added, " but even the uncle Schofield we have all day is an uncle Schofield to love with one's whole heart. "

" I wish I could be sure he would be an uncle for *me* to love with *my* whole heart," thought he, to him-

self; but Alverstoke's unlooked-for generosity made all things seem possible, and he felt that at any rate he should not approach Mr. Schofield hampered with debt as well as with poverty.

Accordingly he listened thoughtfully, and looked appreciatively.

Monica bade him pile up the logs upon the fire. The sisters had praised Mrs. Carnforth's blazing timber, and their uncle had had some brought to his door within a few hours. The station master had sent it up. Though not roughly sawn and severed, it was hissing, steaming, fragrant smelling, and had a compactness and neatness which made amends for size. Dorrien, who from being accustomed to such things never noticed them, merely observed that the firelight danced on Monica's gown as soon as the sunlight had departed, quenched in a sudden cloud.

He knelt in front of the blaze, thoughtfully; the billets in a flame went gayly dancing up the chimney; he watched them burn and saw not they were there.

Monica made some simple remark, he turned in silence and looked at her, and Isabel caught the look. "*Unless*," she said to herself, with a smile, "*Unless*'—oh, my good sister, the time has come for that '*Unless*.'"

"I will see where my uncle is;" a light figure rose, and tripped out. "Perhaps he will join us—presently." The "presently" was not uttered until the door had closed behind the speaker.

Left alone with his love Dorrien's heart bounded, and he had to steady himself for a few moments ere he knew that she was speaking. She was making some gentle, commonplace observation designed to carry off the significance of the moment, and as she spoke she held out towards the fire her taper fingers, spreading them as though to feel the glow.

By a movement only half voluntary, Dorrien leaned forward and drew the hand towards him. She attempted to reclaim, he held it fast. A broken murmur. A protest. An entreaty. She knew that he was speaking; he knew that she was listening; neither was precisely conscious of what was being said or done; when from without, what was that? A sharp shrill scream rang through the house.

Dorrien dropped the hand he held. There was another piercing cry—a frightful agonized cry. At the same moment Isabel Lavenham threw herself, as it were, back into the room she had just quitted, and in shrill terror-stricken accents, and with eyes dilated and arms extended, screamed aloud: "Oh, Monica, he is dead! Oh, Monica, Monica, they say that he is dead!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

"WHAT IS IT? WHAT HAS HAPPENED?"

Ah, what is life? with ills encompassed round,
Amidst our hopes, fate strikes the sudden wound.—GAY.

MONICA's first thought was that Bell had lost her pug. She had lately declared a passion for pugs, and Mr. Schofield, prompt to gratify every whim, had straightway procured a true-bred Willoughby, which was the admiration of the neighborhood. That something had happened to this pet seemed the natural solution of Isabel's distress, and at another time such distress would have had its due share of importance and sympathy.

But Monica was listening to another voice at the moment.

Dorrien was kneeling by her side; he had not, it is true, actually spoken words of love, but he had so perceptibly shown himself on the brink of doing so, had so risen to the occasion and the opportunity, that she could not doubt what these, left to bring forth their own fruits, would have yielded; and it did seem alike thoughtless and cruel of a sister who had but quitted the apartment a few minutes before—quitted it, moreover, because aware that her own presence had become intolerable—thus to break in upon precincts which should have been sacred for the nonce. What could justify such a return?

The door had burst open; and there the intruder stood, blind to all within the curtained and shaded saloon, dim now and vaguely outlined throughout; there she stood,

heedless of the attitude of the one and the silent displeasure of both, with uplifted arms, wailing anew her cry of horror and amazement.

"Good gracious, my dear sister!" said Monica, pettishly. "What is all this lamentation about? You are really rather—rather extreme, are you not? Pray bear it like a Christian, Bell, if Punch, like Mrs. Proudie, 'ain't no more.' Uncle Schofield will get you another Punch."

"Uncle Schofield? Oh, Monica, Monica!" With a swift rush into the room Isabel cast herself at her sister's feet. "Oh, Monica, it can't be true—can it be true? They say—don't your hear what they say? I met them—oh!" with another half-smothered shriek. "When I went out from here—three minutes ago—I had only just left this room—I saw some people at the gate—I wondered what they could be doing there. And they came up to the door. And oh, Monica, Monica!" wringing her hands, "do you think they can know? Oh, what do they mean? What can they mean?" and the poor affrighted thing hid her face afresh, clinging for support to the stronger nature on which she had ever been wont to lean.

"Perhaps I had better go out and inquire what has happened," suggested Dorrien, who began to perceive that there was more in this than had at first appeared. "Shall I go for you?" he added, with a certain pleasurable sensation in thus wording his offer; and at her motion of consent he went.

Outside the door he found quite an assemblage of people, but scarce a sound emanated from the entire group.

"What is it?" inquired he. Insensibly he spoke in an undertone. His eye flew from one to another. Every countenance wore an awe-stricken, paralyzed expression.

"Sir, Mr. Dorrien, sir;" it was the respectable elderly man-servant, who had been in the establishment for some years, who at length touched Dorrien's elbow. "This way, sir," and Rushton turned into the little room in which the week before Monica had been led to rewrite her all-important note. Dorrien started back, for now the room had another occupant.

"Who—what—who is it?" he whispered, hoarsely. His throat felt dry and hard.

"It is—my master, sir."

"Good God!" exclaimed Dorrien, his hands falling by his side. "How? When? When did it happen? And—and how? Did he?—did he?" breaking off short and looking round for the information his tongue refused to crave.

"Down at the station, sir;" another person, the station master, now stepped forward. "He," with a movement of his hand towards the still and motionless form which had been hastily covered and laid on the centre table, "he came down about an hour ago, or less, to meet the 4.15 down-train, the down-train from Liverpool that gets here at 4.50. He used to come by this train himself, sir; but to-day he had been out early, and only wanted to meet another gentleman who was to bring him his letters; and being rather soon upon the platform he stood talking with me, sir—not half an hour ago, sir,——" and the poor fellow swept his hand across his eyes, "and that was on the ticket-office side of the station, this side like. The train he was expecting comes in at the other platform over the way. There are two trains in at almost the moment, though only one runs through. I have always said it was a bad arrangement; I have, indeed, sir. The up-express runs in so sharp round the turning, that anyone not knowing of it, would never think it was so near. Well, sir, I ran in to give some tickets out, and Mr. Schofield he went across and met the down-train. They tell me that he set out to cross again, at the back of the carriages, as they were just going out; he was seen to go in under the bridge, where the guard's van was; and it's thought as how he was caught and knocked down by the up-train running through our station on the other line of rail—it's an express and does not stop—in the next moment. None of us heard or saw anything. We were all busy with the departing train, till the line was clear again; and then some of them cried: 'There's a man lying on the rails under the bridge!' He was quite dead, sir—he must have been killed instantaneous like. It's a terrible thing, sir;" and again the speaker wiped his brow and eye.

"It is the most terrible thing I ever heard of," exclaimed Dorrien, impetuously. "Good heavens! How am I to tell those poor girls?" his thoughts naturally recurring to them. "Within a few yards of his own doorstep, simply crossing as he was accustomed to cross every day of his life! How—how in the world—you say this was his daily train—how did he not know of the danger of meeting the other?"

"He never tried to do such a thing in his life, sir. Always walked up the steps by the side of the bridge, and out at the little top gate, and then over the bridge by the high road. But Mr. Rushton here tells me," indicating the silent and sorrowful. Rushton, "that all day, he"—in reverence for the silent clay, one and all spoke of the dead as "he"—"he had complained of feeling unwell and dizzy like. He might have thought he did not care to climb the steps up to the side path, and would take the easier way for once. He may have felt dizzy when he was struck. Who knows?" and again all stood dumb; none caring to break such a silence.

The drawing-room door opened.

Dorrien turned hastily, and crossing the hall, met the terrified, trembling girls ere they could proceed further. They must not be allowed to learn the truth from anyone but himself.

Forgive him if, amidst all the agitation of the scene, he almost loved his task. Shocked and sickened as he was in all sincerity, it was a dear, delightful privilege to have a share in such a moment; to be admitted to the room which now was filled with sounds of weeping; to be appealed to, clung to, permitted to direct, suggest, and decide. His very presence was a support.

To him, after the first stupefaction of the shock had passed, the grief-stricken household turned for directions and permissions. He went and came between the hall and the drawing-room, shielded the sisters from observation and interrogation, held counsel without and within, and did not depart till it was apparent that there remained nothing further for him to do or think of.

The final arrangements made, he went in for the last time to the still darkened room in which the two

orphans sat, once more bereaved of all, once more homeless, desolate, and adrift.

Isabel would now have quitted the chamber, but, unperceived, Monica held the skirt of her dress, and she was only too glad to comprehend what was intended. Her timid nature shrank from going out alone into the silent, deserted passages, through which had but just tramped those heavy feet, bearing their burden to an upper room. She would have shivered and trembled in some hidden corner close by, until her sister required her, but it was a relief not to need to seek such a refuge.

"I am going now, Miss Lavenham," said Dorrien, in a quiet voice befitting the occasion. "Rushton understands everything. You will not need to see anyone to-night. Good-bye," and in the single word "Good-bye" was all the sympathy which another might have struggled to express, but which was so incomparably better left unspoken.

"Thank you, Mr. Dorrien," with equal self-restraint came the still softer response.

Then there was a momentary hush—a pause—finally a mute leave-taking and a departure. He would return, he said, on the morrow, and he was not forbidden to say so. Having been present at the first awful scene, it was surely permissible that he should be admitted during the seclusion of the mourning days to follow. As he rode from the door, they watched his retreating figure disappear almost instantly in the darkness, and each echoed "To-morrow" in their hearts. What would to-morrow bring?

To both my hero and heroine it seemed years since the evening before, when just about this hour they met in the drawing-room at Bingley Hall. Each had undergone more than one revulsion of feeling, had passed through more than one phase since then. Dorrien had bared his soul to a friend, and received not only wise counsel but timely aid; he had also enlightened his parents; and he had all but knelt at the shrine of his love.

Monica had had a still more momentous history.

Her morning's experience, sufficient as it might have seemed for any one day, had been almost eclipsed by

that of the afternoon, and again the earlier agitations in the hearts of each had sunk into the background behind the awful event which, as it were, set its seal upon all that had gone before.

Neither, however, but was fully, almost painfully aware that this event might, in its own manner and in due season, cement the bond whose formation it had for the time prevented. Dorrien drew a long breath as he cantered lightly past the Schofield's gate. "Poor souls!" he thought, "they little know what has happened,"—(it had been arranged that a messenger should be sent to the Grange later on in the evening, after other more necessary people had been summoned). "Poor souls! But what an escape I have had!" reflected he, the next moment. "To think that I might have been tied up there at this very hour! aye, and should have been if I had not had the luck last night to go and lose my head so as to make Archie Alverstoke tackle me! To think what a near thing it was! Tied up to Daisy Schofield, and Monica free, and—I wonder what she will have? If it is anything in reason—and I don't see why it should be out of reason. The poor old fellow was rich, and I suppose there is no doubt he adopted the girls. Alverstoke seemed to think there was no doubt. How very, how extraordinarily opportune! But I am a brute to think of it. I ought to be, and I *am* sorry. I am certainly sorry. I am most awfully shocked. It is a terrible thing to happen. But, of course, I can't help knowing that it clears my way for Monica; and when I think of Monica, by Jove! I must be forgiven if I forget all the rest. I can pay Archie back at once—that is, as soon as things are arranged. Let me see; how soon can I speak out? Oh, I don't mind waiting a day or two; it would not be decent to say anything till after the funeral; and I may go there every day, of course. Isabel won't mind: she's my friend, and she understands. I'm awfully fond of Isabel. I wonder if she would not do for Alverstoke;" and thus pondering and musing he made his way back through the darkened land to Cullingdon.

"My dear boy, my dear fellow," cried Sir Arthur, half an hour later, "I give you joy, Harry, my boy,—eh—what? Oh, no—no; to be sure I should not have said

that—I did not mean that. I take back my words, Harry. I'm ashamed of myself; by Jove! ashamed of myself. Awful thing to happen—awful, awful. 'Pon my word, never was more shocked in my life. Dear me, yes; 'shocked' is not the word," frowning portentously. "Your mother must call and offer sympathy, and all the rest of it, Harry. Never neglect *les convenances*, my boy. And now, now especially," exultation again breaking loose, and betraying itself in eye and tone, "Lady Dorrien must not be behindhand. Lavenham will sound ever so much better than Schofield; Lavenham blood and Schofield money—that's the mixture, eh, Harry? And you have managed wonderfully, my boy—wonderfully. You have gone about it so softly and quietly. Ha! ha! didn't I always say, *Chi va piano va lontano*, eh? Ha!" And he chuckled under his breath, and, while endeavoring to knit his pale brow into a befitting frown, stealthily rubbed his hands under the table.

Harry went away to dress for dinner. His father's congratulations jarred upon him. He was, he knew, at one with Sir Arthur in his secret soul, but he had just sufficient delicacy of feeling as well as kindness of heart to make him ashamed of the sentiments openly paraded by his parent. He did not like to see Sir Arthur's smile when he avowed himself shocked by the death of Monica's uncle. He recollected Monica's unfeigned sorrow, her tears, her tremblings; he called to his aid all that she had ever told him of the affection wherewith her new-found relation had inspired her; he solemnized his mind by dwelling upon the scene within the little chamber, upon the shrouded form in the midst of the appalled and shuddering group; wondered vaguely—ah, poor fellow! he had never thought much about such things before—whither the spirit of the dead had flown on the instant of its dismissal from its earthly abode; and thus seeking to sober excitement, which, in spite of every effort, continually slid into exhilaration, was at length able to descend and bear his part at the dinner-table without betraying, either by speech or countenance, anything to rouse suspicion on the part of the attendants.

After the evening meal was over he wandered about the house by himself. Somehow he felt as if he had

never before done justice to his home. It was a dear old place—yes, indeed, it was a dear old place. There was a magnificent view from the gallery window; a view which only needed a little opening up. The gallery itself was a fine gallery; a little more light thrown in upon it would make it a remarkably fine gallery. The library had fallen into disorder; libraries should not be allowed to fall into disorder. The library at Cullingdon was one of the best rooms of the house. There was a nice little room out of it. The lounger went quickly forward and passed into the little room. His eye glistened. "I think she would like this," he murmured beneath his breath.

He saw Monica everywhere. Her image rose before him in this attitude and that. Here it was the *pose* of her lovely head against the light; anon the outline of her graceful figure in the shadow. His eye strayed hither and thither to the different places which had been adorned by her presence, to the articles of furniture which had been honored by her use. Now it was a chair in which she had reclined; again a ledge against which she had leaned; and again a casement from which she had gazed.

Here she had accepted from him a flower; there, bestowed upon him a smile. At one spot she had tormented him; at another healed him. Every nook had its own association; and every association was divine.

"Never saw a fellow so hard hit in my life; no, by Jove, I never did," old Sir Arthur whispered and giggled. "Just look at him, my lady; d'ye see how moonstruck the fellow is? He has been meandering about ever since dinner; going from room to room; taking up and handling things without looking at them; and never hearing a word that's said to him! And, by Jove! she's a fine girl, a deuced deal finer girl than the other; and Harry has had the *nous* to see it. Directly she came here, I said to myself it was an infernal pity that she hadn't the other's money down, and Harry might have gone over to her at once. As it is, he has managed a vast deal better. Your son knows a thing or two, my lady; he's no fool, Lady Dorrien. You will have to do whatever Harry tells you in this matter, and no words about it. You will have to forget

your megrims, and trot over with him to-morrow, and leave cards, and inquiries, and all the rest of it. Harry will tell you what to do. Yes, by Jove! Lavenham blood and Schofield money; it's a glorious combination. And I don't fancy Harry will need to be told to do up the old place. That's her doing—this Lavenham girl's doing. Oh, I heard her; I heard her praising this and that; and I never was better pleased, even when I had not a notion what a turn affairs were taking. *Now*, of course it will be everything if she sticks to what she said then. Harry was talking about putting the library in order: I suppose that means she told him it was out of order. He tells me that we ought to see to the roof on the left wing—but, bless my soul! if we begin with roofs—however there is no knowing where we shan't begin, if Harry takes us in hand. What will the figure be, I wonder?" musing, with his thin fingers pressed together at the tips. "Sixty, seventy, eighty? Who is to say that it might not be a hundred? These mercantile men think nothing of a couple of hundred thousand, and there are but the two girls. Confound it! there will be legacies, however," his face falling; "people are perfect idiots about legacies; and if Joseph Schofield was a cranky creature—but I don't fancy Joseph was that. No, no; he was a sensible man, a very worthy, decent sort of man; and if putting a bit of crape round my hat would please Harry, I'm sure I should have no objection in life, provided all goes well. I would do anything in the way of compliment. I'll go to the funeral if Harry wishes. Joseph is sure to have done the thing handsomely, eh, my lady? These Liverpool men always do the thing handsomely; it is part of their business; it is what they are for. Now, Joseph has been at it for, let me see," calculating, "for forty years or so; began young, we'll say; well, forty years in Liverpool means a long sum of addition in £. *s. d.* Joseph must be worth his couple of hundred thousand, eh? Well, well, hardly as much as that, perhaps; his hundred and fifty equally divided. But then there are the legacies," his brow again overclouding; "who is to say how much may not be dribbled away in those confounded legacies? There ought to be a law against such infernal nonsense. Depend

upon it, we shall lose something in legacies; we must make up our minds to that; but, anyway, there ought to be sixty or seventy down, and of course there is always the chance of the sister's share coming in too. I wonder how soon we shall hear; how soon it will have leaked out? If I knew anyone in Liverpool likely to be an authority I would go in to-morrow; but, at any rate, Harry can go in to-morrow; and he can go over to the house; and it can't be a secret long; the other Schofields will let it out;" and thus the well-pleased old tongue babbled on, little dreaming of the news in store.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A FEW NIGHTS AGO I WAS SO—HAPPY.

For of fortune's sharp adversitie,
The worst kind of infortune is this,
A man that hath been in prosperitie,
And it remembers, when it passéd.—CHAUCER.

"AND oh, dear! oh, dear! What is to be done with those poor girls?"

The speaker was Mrs. George Schofield, whose eyes were red with tears, and whose large white pocket handkerchief with its black border, formed an important feature of her lap.

"A few months ago, and I should have said, Oh, it's a terrible thing to happen; but look, he leaves no wife and children; and there's scarcely a man about but has his wife and children,—so that really it would not have been so bad but that it might have been worse—though perhaps I should think shame of myself for saying such a thing. But when we went over, Daisy and I, the very night we heard—such a night as it was too, blowing and raining, for all it had been such a beautiful day!—and found those two poor young creatures sitting crouching over the hearth, so miserable and lonely, I said to Daisy afterwards, 'Talk of daughters, they seemed for all the world as if they had been poor cousin Joseph's own daughters!' Well, they have been

treated as such; nothing was too good for them, nor yet too grand for them; he was so set upon those girls. Ah dear! the question is, What will they do now? You have heard about the will, of course?"

Her companion was a distant relation who had come to attend a funeral. He had heard about the will. Knowing nothing of the Miss Lavenhams, and very little of the Schofield branch of his family, he now presumed the deceased had done the right thing, and left his money in a proper channel.

"A proper channel! I don't know what you mean by a proper channel," replied Mrs. Schofield, with a vague idea of resentment. "All I know is, he has left it to none of his own people; and though, as I say, that would have been neither here nor there three months ago,—I am sure none of us want it, though I did think George being in the business—but, however, let that be. But when a man takes into his house two poor penniless orphans, and in a manner adopts them, and all, he ought surely to have left them *something*. Why, here's my Daisy, she says she knows her cousin meant to do well by them both, for he was joking her one day about being an heiress—you know Daisy has her grandfather's money, Mr. Henderson, and a pretty penny it is, but that's between you and me,—well, poor cousin Joseph only a week ago, was making fun with her on the sly saying that if she didn't look sharp maybe some day her cousins might cut her out, for an uncle might do as well as a grandfather at a pinch, with more of that kind of *funning*—and though it was under pretence of teasing Daisy, who, he knew was a wee thing shy of hearing this money of hers talked about, she holds to it that she was sure he was in solemn earnest all the time. He had that way with him, cousin Joseph had. When he built that fine house of his, he was forever laughing beforehand about what he was going to do. As soon as ever he had made up his mind to a thing he would joke about it, to kind of take off the edge. So then, directly I heard he had been joking Daisy about making more heiresses in the family, said I, '*He'll make them.*' And so he would have made them if he had but lived to do it."

"That would hardly do to go to law with, Mrs. Schofield."

"Nay, who said anything about the law, Mr. Henderson? Of course those that get will keep; and all I do declare is that, if my poor cousin had lived to die peaceably in his bed, he would have made a different will."

A good many other people thought that if Mr. Schofield had lived he would have made a different will, but only one person knew how near he had been to doing so, and Monica kept her lips inscrutably sealed upon the subject.

From the first she felt no real hope. Her uncle's words had burnt themselves into her brain. "I mean to do for you as if you were my own." "I intend to make a settlement."

In such form had his communications been couched; and directly she was able to think, the remembrance lay like lead upon her heart.

Of one thing she was thankful: she had neither had time nor inclination to confide in her sister the object of the sought-for interview. At its termination she had flown to her own chamber, eager for a brief term of solitude before meeting Dorrien and Bell's curiosity had been easily satisfied with an assurance that nothing alarming had occurred, and that further confidence should be given presently. She had been more interested in Dorrien's visit, and in trying to discover Monica's attitude towards him, than in anything her uncle Schofield might have seen fit to communicate. Subsequently she had forgotten the "business talk" altogether.

But Monica? To Monica there was now but one question of paramount importance. Had her lost guardian carried out his intentions, or had he not? If not —farewell all besides. She was only too well aware of the absolute impossibility of her wedding one of the ruined Dorriens, unless she could replenish the fortunes of the house, to entertain the slightest hope on that score.

She had, within a few hours learned to know how dear such a hope might become to her. But once more penniless, or almost penniless, what chance for her lover? She did Dorrien justice, because she could not help doing him justice. A woman is rarely at fault when she is the object of deep, strong, unchecked pas-

sion, and Monica Lavenham was a woman of quick apprehension and keen intuition. She had indeed been prejudiced to blindness in regard to her cousin, Daisy Schofield, but there had been abundant cause for her being so; and it may be added that, even had no explanation taken place between the girls, a very short time would have sufficed to clear away a youthful and foolish antipathy.

But with Dorrien the case was different. She had felt him hers, even before he had known himself to be so. It was no question of expediency—the expediency was all the other way. He was hers, but how long would he remain so? If only he had spoken—and yet she knew that it was better that he had not spoken. It must now be her part to prevent his speaking. Should she by the wildest chance be found in possession of the fortune which her uncle had designed for her, Dorrien should be allowed to plead his cause. A word, a sign, a look would bring him at any moment; but if—she set her lips resolutely and gazed with wide-open eyes into the future—if nothing had been done, all must be over that ever might have been between her and Harry Dorrien.

Kind Mrs. Schofield, well to the front during the days of mourning which intervened between the fatal event and the last sad rites being paid, was both astonished and edified by the strict resolution with which Monica denied the house to all comers. She and Daisy had taken up their abode at Flodden Hall by the sisters' earnest request, to be with them for the time being; and with her new feelings towards the latter, and softened in all respects towards the former, Monica was now so respectful, affectionate, and considerate, that perhaps the worthy matron's indignant outburst above recorded, owed more to the recollection of that secluded period than to any previous opinion on the subject. We are all alike in our susceptibility of kindness: and although, as we have said before, Mrs. Schofield had been treated with decency, and even with good-humored tolerance by the Miss Lavenhams, they had never before shown, because they had never before felt, anything more.

Monica was now all attention and deference. The

homely, wholesome sorrow which found vent in sighs, and tears, and many a simple reminiscence, suited her at this juncture better than finer feelings might have done; while, as for Daisy, she found Daisy more and more congenial every hour.

The cousins did everything together. Bell being laid up with a species of nervous attack which required rest and soothing attentions,—required Mrs. Schofield, in short, who had the talents of a nurse and the figure for a sick-room,—the two who had erewhile been not only rivals but antagonists, were now thrown into each other's company all day long.

Was it because in Daisy's companionship Monica saw an excuse for not admitting Dorrien, that she so assiduously cultivated it? Partly. On his appearance at Flodden Hall the day after the tragic event, he had been informed that Mrs. Schofield and her daughter had taken up their residence within the mansion, and that orders had been given to exclude all others. The younger Miss Lavenham was seriously unwell from the shock.

In order to soften such a sentence, however, Monica went out to the door and exchanged a few words with the visitor. They understood—or at least he fancied that they understood—each other. He was not to come because the Schofields had come. It was fitting that Mrs. Schofield and her daughter should be in the house where lay the remains of one who had not only been their near relation, but neighbor and friend; but, whilst they were there, Dorrien was better away.

"We think we had better not let in any of our friends," said Monica softly—he told himself "reluctantly,"—but the reluctance, if there were any, went hand in hand with resolution.

He had to ride away, and one pair of eyes from behind the blinds saw him go. Mrs. Schofield was almost vexed that no one could think of an excuse for his admission. Considering that he had been there the day before, had actually been present at the first sad scene, it seemed to her that an exception might very well be made in his favor,—and as she spoke, she looked at Daisy. Daisy had on a black dress—she had had one lying by—and it now really seemed as

if Daisy, if no one else, might be allowed to see Mr. Dorrien.

"I have tried to undeceive her for some time," Daisy's little rueful face came close to Monica presently, "but she clings to the idea. It will pass away. Do not mind, Monica."

"I shall have no right to 'mind' soon," murmured poor Monica, with a set lip. But outwardly she only kissed her cousin's cheek, remarking for the first time what a soft young cheek it was. "But for me," she said to herself, "he might have been happy with her; by my doing, we each lose all."

The funeral over, it could no longer be concealed that all, in so far as Mr. Schofield's adopted daughters were concerned, had been lost.

Previous to their appearance on the scene he had, under the belief that he possessed no relations who required assistance, bequeathed his wealth in the very manner most dreaded by Sir Arthur Dorrien. Sir Arthur had not indeed anticipated the full extent of the damage, having but imagined, at the worst, a curtailment of the young ladies' fortunes by ten thousand pounds or so. Imagine then his feelings on hearing that the whole had gone, and gone to public charities and benevolent institutions!

No second will had been made, none had even been spoken about to the legal adviser who now produced the document; and it could therefore be but a matter of pure conjecture whether or not any other might ultimately have taken its place.

Under such circumstances nothing could be said. The Miss Lavenhams had barely been three months resident beneath their uncle's roof; so that, although it was easy to surmise that they might eventually have become his heirs, no one could positively assert that they would have done so. Certainly no claim could be put forward on their behalf.

"Good God, Alverstoke, she hasn't a penny!" Dorrien's voice was hoarse, and his eyes were strained and bloodshot. He had taken horse, and galloped the entire distance between his own door and that of his friend, and now burst in, without waiting either for permission or announcement.

Luckily Alverstoke was alone.

"Hasn't a penny!" echoed the latter, rising to his feet and suddenly sitting down again. "I—stop a moment. I don't understand. You mean Miss Lavenham, of course?"

"Of course; who else should I mean?" loudly, "I tell you it has all come out,—we knew we should hear to-day,—and, by Heaven! we *have* heard. So there is an end of *me!*" and he dashed his hat and whip on to the table and flung himself down, staring at his companion with wild, passionate orbs.

"When did you hear?" said Alverstoke.

"Just now. Not an hour ago. I was at the funeral, and just as I was wondering who I should hang on to, to hear about matters, I met Carnforth. I guessed that Carnforth would know, and he did. He told me everything."

"What, *he* told you? It may not be so bad then, if you only had it from Carnforth," observed Alverstoke, dryly. "I should not go by what any one of the Carnforths say."

"No more I did; but—but I am ashamed to say it—I went to old Mr. Rowland next, and his word is another man's oath, and—and it's true, by God, it's true!" throwing himself into a fresh attitude.

"Don't give up hope, Harry."

"*I* have not given up hope—hope has given up *me*. You don't know how I have held on. I have been half afraid—uneasy—I don't know what. I did not like her refusing to see me, and the Schofields' being there. I feared they might have been saying things;"—

—"Well, they might, you know."

"Of, course they might, but Monica knew all there was to know about that long ago. I told her a lie about it too, but she had got over the lie. She—oh! she had grown to forgive me everything," and his head dropped upon his hands.

"It is rough upon you, Harry." Alverstoke rose up and put his hand for a moment on Dorrien's shoulder. "I supposed——," he began thoughtfully, and paused.

"Nothing can be done now—nothing," said Dorrien, in a broken voice. "You did all for me that a fellow could do, but there is no way out of this. We are a ruined race. The sins of our forefathers have found

us out. If I had had but a pittance,—but how could I ask a girl like that to share a pittance?"

"People do, you know."

"It is no matter," said Dorrien, with impatience; "I have not got it. I have nothing, absolutely nothing but what my father allows me; and *you* know, Alverstoke, what I should have to expect from that quarter. I ought not to blame him either. Until lately—until I met with—with her, I felt as he did. Marriage without money was a thing impossible in our family. We are draining our very life's blood to keep going as it is. Oh! a few nights ago I was—so—happy."

Alverstoke threw a log upon the fire, and trampled it down with his foot. He would not look anywhere but into the blaze he made.

For a brief period the clock ticked on in the room, and its monotonous note was the only sound that broke the silence.

"Have you seen her at all, since?" inquired Alverstoke, at last.

"Only once. The next day. She came to the door to tell me I was not to go in. That was all."

"Do you suppose she knew then?"

"I do not suppose she was thinking about it. The Schofields were there, and of course I—they—it would not have done to admit me. As soon as I knew they were to be in the house for a time, I understood, of course, to wait."

"You have not met again?"

"Met the Schofields?"

"No, Miss Lavenham. You did not see her to-day?"

"I saw her. She was there. I did not get near her, The family party kept together; and after we left the churchyard their carriage had gone. Those of us who were merely there as outsiders walked off down to the train. It was then I walked with Carnforth. Afterwards I got into the railway carriage with old Mr. Rowland."

"And it is absolutely certain?"

"Absolutely. Rowland had been hearing all about it just before the funeral, from the solicitor himself. The house will be sold; young Schofield succeeds to the

business; as for the rest—he had no 'rest' to think about when he made the will."

"The poor girls must turn out, then?"

"Must turn out? Yes. Go where they came from, or where they can get—or, in short, anywhere. A nice look-out, isn't it? Not twenty years old yet, and twice turned out of house and home! Good Heavens! When I think of it!" and he tossed hither and thither, finding torture in every fresh movement.

"It is bad luck," said Alverstoke in his soft, dreamy drawl. "I never heard of worse luck. If there were anything one could do——,"

—"There is nothing one can do. In my first idiocy I rushed straight to Sir Arthur. I thought, if it was possible—if I could make him believe my honor was pledged—but I was a fool. I might have known it would be no use. He cannot give what he has not got; and if I had been engaged ten times over it must have been the same—all must have come to an end now; so——" and he drew a long burning breath and bit the lip which betrayed him by its trembling.

"I suppose—you—you could not work?" said Alverstoke, hesitating.

"Work? I am nearly thirty years of age, and I have never worked in my life. Who would care for my 'work' now? I know nothing—I can do nothing. My father would as soon have thought of setting me to labor in the fields, as of having me taught anything by which I could earn a penny. We have been fools all through—now we shall be beggars."

"I suppose your father is very much cut up."

"Raves," said Dorrien, curtly.

"And your mother?"

"I don't know anything about her."

"You had better come and stop with me—you must get away."

Dorrien rose from his chair.

"Don t think me, ungrateful," he said, huskily; "and don't call me a driveller; but I am going to hang on still to—to——"

—"To what?"

"To a hope—to a chance. It may not be as bad as they say. I tell myself it is. I know it is—but I can-

not yet *feel* that it is. Anyhow I'll wait. I won't do anything till—till *she* goes. And then——." He broke off with his back to his companion.

"Well? And then?"

Dorrien affected not to hear.

"And then?" said Alverstoke, standing in front of him.

Dorrien turned his head, and looked about for his accoutrements.

"What shall you do then, Dorrien?"

"Go to the devil," said Dorrien, shortly.

CHAPTER XXV.

FAREWELL TO A HOME.

> Farewell! A word that must be, and hath been—
> A sound which makes us linger; yet—farewell!—BYRON.

"YES, dear, it is all right. I have found out all about it. We can go across the river to Birkenhead—Birkenhead is exactly opposite Liverpool, and the crossing is a mere nothing—and we will take the evening train to London. One leaves about six. It is dark before then, now; so it is hardly likely that anyone will see us; and we shall be in town by a little after eleven o'clock.'

Three weeks had elapsed since the events took place which have been recorded in the last chapter.

The speaker, Monica Lavenham, entered her sister's bed-chamber, where Isabel, still pale and weak from recent illness, lay on a couch surrounded by piles of luggage. The attack of nervous prostration brought on by the severity of the shock to which she had been exposed, had only just been sufficiently surmounted to enable the invalid to contemplate removal from the scene of the tragic event; but it had been felt that she now needed change still more than repose, and, to the relief of both, medical permission had been received for the transit. London was to be once more the sisters' destination.

They had now no home; they were to face the world

this time by themselves. Lodgings had been taken for them; their maid had been dismissed, their trunks packed, and the last day at Flodden Hall had come.

"I am really sorry to go," said Bell, looking round with wistful eyes; "we have really been rather happy here."

Monica made no reply. A few minutes afterwards she found an excuse for leaving the apartment, and going downstairs into the large, empty, desolate drawing-room. It had not yet been dismantled.

She stood and looked slowly round and round; backwards and forwards her roving thoughts flew athwart the past four eventful months. How had this place become altered since first she stepped within its walls! Not merely in outward form, but in spirit, essence, and association! She recalled it on that first summer eve, glittering, gorgeous, commodious, but barren of every other attribute; and anon, in the waning light of an autumnal afternoon, with the shadows falling softly on the hearth, and a form, a countenance, a presence there, with whom it would be forever united in memory.

She sat down in the chair by which Dorrien had knelt; she told herself that he would never kneel thus again.

Since the day on which she had herself dismissed him from the doorstep, he had returned no more. There had, of course, been the excuse of Bell's illness, and Monica had known how to make such an excuse do its part. He might, to be sure, have written, but he had not written. She had understood.

Very bitter had been her thoughts during the past lonely weeks and yet she had not blamed her lover, having known whom to blame.

"If I had not done this," a voice whispered loudly at this cruel moment, "if I had merely held back at the first—and oh, how easily I might have done that! —all would have been different. It would have still been sad to go from here; sad to lose so kind a friend, so good a home; but at least I should have gone with no sting at my heart. I do not think I love Harry Dorrien—much. At first I did not love him at all. I had not even that excuse. It was sheer vanity, pure,

wanton mischief which led me on to do it. Then I grew to like the mischief for its own sake—I mean, I grew to care a little about a man who should have been indifferent to me—and now, I have wrecked his happiness without adding to my own. Daisy would have made him a good, loving wife; now he will get no wife. He is wretchedly poor; now he must remain in his poverty. She lives in an uncongenial home from which he would have delivered her; now she must remain in that home. Who did all this? I did. I, and for what? For fun, for occupation, for amusement. I wanted something to do. I was idle. I thought no harm of it. Very well," and the speaker pressed her lips together stonily. "Very well. I hope I am satisfied with my work. Dorrien miserable, Daisy deserted, myself triumphant. Oh, what a merry piece of work this has been! To think that it all should be owing to me! And all of this," she suddenly cried, springing to her feet, "all of this I owe to the world. The world has made me what I am. I am a poor, selfish, vain, shallow, unprincipled girl. I have neither heart nor conscience. I hardly know right from wrong; no one has taught me; no one has guided me, nor restrained me. I have been let go where I would. Now," and she paused, while a heavy cloud gathered on her young brow, "now I begin to see, to know myself. I see a worthless self. I see a cruel, unsparing thief. A girl who could rob another, for the sake of robbing. I did not prize this Dorrien; at least, I did not once; I hardly do now. He will soon be forgotten; but what I cannot forget," and again her voice rose in broken murmurs as though forced to let loose something of the tumult within, "what I cannot forget nor forgive, is—myself. Is it too late to be another self? Shall I ever learn other ways? I might begin afresh; it would be for the first time, and I know nothing, I am so ignorant, so foolish! but still—I think I might—I think I will ——." Alone in the great deserted saloon she sank down upon her knees, and prayed.

"How long you have been!" exclaimed Isabel, fretfully, when at length her sister's step was heard returning. "And you know there is still so much to do. There are all the labels to be written——"

—"Here they are!"

"Oh, you have been writing them. I could not think what you were doing. And, Monica, we ought to say 'Good-bye' to Jenkinson, and——"

—"I have seen Jenkinson, and all the others. You were hardly fit for it."

"Oh, thank you. I am glad to be off that. But I have been thinking—the Schofields?"

"The Schofields will not expect us. I told them yesterday that we should go this week; and we can write when we get to London. You know what Mrs Schofield is—the kindest person possible, but absolutely unable to keep a secret. It would have been all over the neighborhood if I had told her that we intended leaving to-night. We both wish particularly to slip away unobserved."

"Of course. But, Monica," and Bell paused and looked with an air of hesitation at her sister.

"Well?" said Monica.

"Mr. Dorrien," said Isabel, in rather a low voice. "Ought we not——" timidly suggestive. "Is there nothing we can do about him?"

"There is nothing." Then Monica walked quickly up and kissed her sister's brow. "Don't fret, dear Bell. I doubt if Harry Dorrien and I should have suited each other. We are too much alike; and neither of us has yet learned life's lessons. We—but I need no longer say 'we.' There is no 'we' now. He is nothing to me; he never ought to have been anything. Let the past be past, and let us both try to do better in the future. There is nothing more to be done ere we leave here," continued the speaker, seating herself on a low seat and leaning her head on Isabel's shoulder. "Let us talk about the future. In the future, dear sister," and Monica's voice became gentle and tender, "you and I have much to learn. I think I have already begun to learn it; will you also try?"

"Was that why you would not go to the Delafords?" asked Isabel, after a pause.

"Partly, yes."

"But the Delafords are not *bad* people, Monica."

"They are people like ourselves," said Monica, sadly. "Without religion, without principle, without very much

morality. We should get no good there; we should lose all we have learned here."

"But they are our friends," murmured the other, ruefully. "What are we to do for friends if we are not to be with people like ourselves, as you call it?"

"Do you call the Delafords friends," said Monica, with something of her old disdain. "Were they 'friends' when we came here? When we felt we had not a friend in the world did any one of them come forward?"

"They have come forward now."

"They think we have inherited fortunes; I am afraid that is the simple truth, dear sister."

"Do you really think so, Monica?"

"You are surprised, are you? You have forgotten all past scores? But, Bell, I cannot forget so soon; and neither you nor I will set foot within a door that once was closed to us; though what am I saying?" she added with a smile that was too sad to be sarcastic; "the doors will be double-locked, barred, and bolted now. We are not only impoverished, we have been degraded. They will consider that we have lost everything. So we have. Now let us begin again. I have glimmerings of something better in store for you and for me than we have ever yet had. We are now stripped of all hindrances; we have got rid of the past. The future is open to us to make of it our own future. Suppose we try" and Monica looked tenderly at her sister.

"I will do whatever you like, of course," replied poor Bell, rather gravely. She was not quite sure what was meant by all this.

"I have had time to think," continued Monica, as though speaking aloud and from an irrepressible impulse, "and I do not know that I ever thought before. If all these changes had not come upon us, perhaps I should never have thought at all. Life has been such a whirl with us both. But when our great break-up came I began to understand how very easy it was to lose everything that was pleasant, and charming, and delightful; how all at once home, friends, pleasures dropped off like leaves from a tree. It seemed as if we were laid bare in a single day. That was my first awakening. You remember how we used to talk about it? I saw then how little of real kindness or affection lay beneath the

surface of the world we lived in. I almost hated everyone we met. After Uncle Lavenham's decision was made known, the faces we saw on every side, what did they express? Real sorrow and sympathy? Not a glimpse of it. There was hardly a trace of sincere honest concern on one; it was all curiosity, astonishment, and sham condolence. Then we came here. You know what we found here. I cannot speak of it; I can hardly bear yet to think of it. And how did we —or, at least, how did I—requite all? By bringing the follies of the town into this quiet place. By scorning these good, true people, meddling with their peace, and wounding, cruelly wounding, both their affections and their dignity. Daisy Schofield loved, and I stole her lover."

Bell started.

"We spoke only openly together that day," said Monica, sorrowfully. "I always meant to tell you, but I could not trust myself till now. You were not to be agitated. When I went over to see Daisy the morning after the Carnforths' dinner party, I was in my worst, most foolish mind. I felt giddy with triumph, and perhaps—perhaps with something—some slight touch of another feeling. Mr. Dorrien——" she paused.

"I *know* you care for him," exclaimed Bell, with impetuous warmth. "Deny it, as you please, I know you do."

Monica colored deeply. She did not even attempt to deny.

"Do not be vexed with me," continued Isabel, perceiving the effect of her words with some apprehension. "I ought not to have said it, but when I hear you talking of 'some slight touch' and when I know you so well—now do go on; what did Daisy say? And what did you say? And—and——?"

"I cannot tell you one half. It was all so strange, so very strange! And so wonderful! Bell, she would not blame me—she would not blame him. She said it was natural, spoke as if it were inevitable, that—that——"

"That he should leave her for you?"

"Yes. If you had only heard her! And so quietly, so simply—I kept saying to myself 'Who is this talk-

ing? Who am I listening to?' There was a delicacy about it all which I cannot describe. Instead of trying to make me feel ashamed, as she might easily have done—for, indeed, I was ashamed enough without the added reproach of anyone else—she used every argument she could think of to prove to me that I had done no harm. She wished to make out that it was involuntary—I mean my attraction for—for him. She seemed as if she could not bear to think evil of either of us."

"I always said Daisy was a nice girl, you know, Monica." It seemed to Bell as though she really must edge in a word somewhere. "I always thought you were too hard upon her, Monica."

"You did; you were far kinder and better than I. Well, my eyes are opened at last. And I have talked much with Daisy about other things since then. She is so good—you have no idea how good she is, and so humble and modest in reality, though she has that little quick manner that misleads people—that directly she is alone with you, and begins to talk of—of things she really cares for, and believes in—religious things you know," her tone suitably lowering, "you can hardly understand how you could ever have seen anything in her to laugh at. There *is* nothing to laugh at. She only needs a little outward polish—a few hints—what is that? She has no innate vulgarity. She would have been a perfectly fit and proper wife for Mr. Dorrien. He did not value her. But I think he would have learned to value her. He could not have helped loving her."

"The Schofields could never have been fit for the Dorriens, Monica."

"I do not think they could. No, certainly, they could not. I can scarcely fancy," and she smiled, "Mrs. Schofield as mother-in-law at Cullingdon. But no one knows better than Mr. Dorrien that it is not necessary in these days to cultivate domestic intimacies. Daisy herself is almost as great an anomaly at the Grange as her mother would be at Cullingdon. She is not in sympathy with the rest. We might have found this out long ago, had we taken the trouble. If Mr. Dorrien had married her——" she paused.

"Well," said Bell, "let Mr. Dorrien marry her now."

Monica's face changed. She looked as if a hand had struck her.

Presently she rose and slipped away, and Isabel smiled a little to herself—but the smile was a doleful one. It was now about three o'clock. They were to leave at four.

The day was densely chill and dark, a sweeping mist from time to time overshadowing the face of the country, and a slight, incessant moan of wind sounding more melancholy and oppressive than any uproar of the elements would have done.

"It is miserable going away like this!" exclaimed Isabel, when all the preparations were complete, and the two sat waiting for the fly which was to convey them to the station. "We thought we were miserable when we came, and now I feel as if we had been quite happy then. Do you remember what a glorious summer day it was, Monica! We laughed at the house, and the gardens, and the little lodge, and the minuteness and circumscribedness altogether, but we did not know how very comfortable it could be, nor how large it would grow. It has grown to be quite large, has it not? One does not seem to miss a park when the road is only a shady lane, through which very few carriages pass. And there is plenty of room at the back, down below the garden, where you and Mr. Dorrien—oh, Monica, I did not mean it!"

"You do not suppose I mind *that*?" said Monica, with a cry of scorn. "Say 'You and Mr. Dorrien' as much as you please, if it is any gratification to you. I can stand more than that. And, for Heaven's sake, let there be no skeleton in our cupboard—even if our cupboard be bare," with a faint attempt at jocularity. "Mr. Dorrien would make a handsome skeleton, I allow, but I do not see him in that light. We'll talk of Harry now and then, Bell. He was rather a nice Harry. I wish I had behaved differently to him. Heigho!" struggling for a lighter mood, "it will not do to go over all that again just now. We shall have time enough to talk and talk, soon. To-day we must have our wits about us. Travelling alone is a different thing to travelling with Josephine; if we are not eagle-eyed we shall be having our luggage wrongly labelled, our hand-

bags purloined, our sticks and umbrellas left in the racks."

"And there is that dreadful crossing, besides. You say it is a mere nothing, but I know a mere nothing can be very disagreeable. Is it as far as from Dover to Calais?"

"My dear Bell!" Monica laughed.

"Is it half as far? Quarter as far?"

"It is not even quarter as far. I believe it takes about ten minutes, at the outside; and boats cross and recross all day long."

"How shall we know which boat to take?"

"It is called the railway boat; and our cabman will tell us where to go."

"How shall we get a porter?"

"Plenty of porters on the pier, my dear. There will be not only no difficulty, but an *embarras de richesses*, the difficulty will be to get away from them."

Isabel sighed. "I hope it will be all right," she murmured dolefully. "But if we had only had someone to go with us! Even George Schofield."

"You know why we could not ask George."

"Or Lionel Carnforth."

"Lionel Carnforth? No, thank you."

"Or Ernest Rowland."

"Not even Ernest Rowland."

"Or—or—or anybody." She would not again pronounce Dorrien's name.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"I DARE NOT SAY MORE."

'Twere vain to tell thee all I feel,
Or say for thee I'd die.—WADE.

"Now, you see we have got on very well, so far," said Monica, cheerfully, as the sisters travelled along through rows of lighted streets, on their way to the landing-stage. "We have surmounted the first terrors of the way. This is a very respectable cab, and we are in good time."

"In more than 'good time,' I hope," rejoined her sister, with the anxiety of an unaccustomed traveller; "suppose anything goes wrong?"

"We can afford half-an-hour for anything going wrong. It is exactly ten minutes to five o'clock," leaning forward to catch a glimpse of a clock within a watchmaker's window; "we shall be on the other side by a quarter-past five, allowing for all delays; and our train does not start till a quarter to six. I believe the people in the railway boat will think us lunatics to cross by the five o'clock boat, whose train only goes to Chester."

"But we may have some distance to drive on the other side."

"No, my dear Bell, we have no distance to drive on the other side; in fact, we have not to drive at all. We have simply to walk up, while a porter walks up in front of us. The said porter carries our luggage on a truck; we pay the said porter, dismiss the truck, and hop-skip-and-jump into the train."

"You seem in good spirits, Monica," in dejected, almost reproachful accents. "I wish I had your spirits."

Monica laughed; she was in the humor to laugh. It was so odd, so supremely diverting, to be accused of being in good spirits when she had never felt more forlorn, more unutterably desolate and wretched in her life. Once allow to herself that she was unhappy, once dare to pry into the depths of her heavy heart, and there would be no more cheering, hopeful words, no more making light of poor Isabel's timid alarms, no more beguiling of her pensive regrets. Nay, she must hold down with a firm, unrelaxing grip, every thought, reflection, and apprehension that would tend to unnerve at such a moment. She must be brisk and bantering, busy and bustling, since thus, and thus only, could the necessary self-control and composure be obtained.

As the vehicle stopped she sprang out, opening the door for herself.

"Railway boat," she cried, promptly, beginning to pull out the various articles, as she had seen Josephine pull them, and admonishing Bell to sit still till everything was arranged for the transit. "Railway boat. Is there a porter here?"

"Hi, there!" cried the cabman. "All right, miss; he's coming," turning round again. "Bad night to cross, ladies," beginning to haul down the trunks from the top.

"Bad night, is it?" said Isabel's voice from within. "Did he say it was a bad night, Monica?"

"Oh, a 'bad night,'" said Monica, condescendingly. "He only means it is rather dark on the river, and cold, and raw. It is not raining, and we shall all be right directly we are on board."

"Oh, yes, miss; all right directly you're on board," assented the cabman, easily. "The boats are running, aren't they, Jim?" to the porter who came up with his truck. "Boats are all running, I suppose?"

"Haven't stopped at all to-day," replied Jim, proceeding to load. "There was a talk of it an hour ago, but it cleared off again."

"What cleared off?" inquired Monica, turning to him.

"The fog on the river, miss. It comes down pretty sharp sometimes at this season; and it has been off and on all day. But there's no need to be uneasy, miss. Only the Woodside boats don't run if it's at all bad."

"But I hope they will run," replied the young lady, to whom the above conveyed but indifferent consolation. "We are going to London by the quarter to six o'clock train from Birkenhead."

"The 5.45? Oh, you'll get over long before the 5.45 anyhow, miss."

Monica said no more; luckily Isabel had not heard anything; if the worst came to the worst, she told herself, there would be a way out of the difficulty; they could easily go by the London and North-Western from Liverpool.

Originally they had selected the other line of rail, on account of getting in at Paddington Station, thus avoiding the long drive from Euston to Albion Street, in which latter part of the metropolis their lodgings had been taken. But Great Western or London and North-Western made little odds if it came to any real obstacle; and she was almost inclined to turn round as it was, have the trunks replaced on the cab, and drive to Lime Street.

Isabel, however, had alighted, the porter with his

load was already on the move, and it only remained to pay the cabman and follow.

Presently Bell slipped her hand through her sister's arm. "It feels so strange," she murmured. "This great, wild, noisy place, and you and me alone here. How far have we to go, Monica?"

"I believe we are on the landing stage now." They were descending by a covered way, and were in truth on the stage, as she said:

"What numbers of people are going!" cried Bell, next. "It can't be really a 'bad night,'" her mind running on the words, "or they would not cross in such swarms. Look, Monica, here, there, everywhere —men with little black bags and newspapers. Did you ever see such numbers of little black bags and newspapers? Oh, this is the landing stage? But where is the river?" looking about. "Where is the river? What is that? Why Monica!" breaking off, and drawing back in consternation. "How dark it is! A few minutes ago it was quite bright. The gas lamps seem all going out."

"No fear, miss," said the porter, looking round encouragingly. "There's a bit of a fog, but the boats are all running. Here is yours just coming in. She's swinging round now," setting down his barrow.

"Why, I can hardly see her," murmured Isabel.

Monica said nothing. In her heart she liked it no better than her sister did. The two had never been used to rough sights and sounds, such journeyings as they had hitherto undertaken having invariably been made under luxurious auspices; and it was accordingly with a sense of trepidation and nervous excitement that she now found herself out on this dark, weird October night, in the midst of a bewildering scene, in charge of a sister who at no time could be reckoned upon as a support, and who was now to be considered almost in the light of an invalid.

Devoutly she now wished they had not devised this route. It had been her own thought, based partly on the desire to escape chance observation by avoiding the station from which they would have naturally have taken their departure, and partly, as we have said, from a timely recollection that by starting from Birken-

head they could arrive at Paddington. But she had not calculated on the strangeness, the discomfort of the proceeding.

A thick sea-fog had swept over the river, and only gave up to view the ferry steamers which from time to time arrived from different parts of the opposite bank, when within a few yards of the landing-stage. At close quarters, however, the boats looked bright and tempting, their cheerful deck-saloons well packed with people, and plenty of light everywhere.

"As soon as we get on board we can sit down comfortably," said Monica. "The man says this next is the railway boat, and that it will be cleared in a moment, when we can go on board at once."

"I am sure I am glad of it," replied Bell, disconsolately. "A great rough man trod on my foot just now, and never even begged my pardon. And they do push and jostle one so."

"We had better stand back a little, and let this stream pass. Then we can be the first to step in."

"Monica, is it—is it dangerous the stepping in? Is it over a plank?"

"Dear me, no, child; you have been on a steamboat before; don't be silly. You have got in and out like anybody else, and never thought about it, when we went aboard."

"But this is different. It is so dark and dismal——"

"Oh, come, it is not dark now. Look how those lamps flare. And there is not a breath of wind—and it is not raining. It is quite a soft, mild night."

"A miserable night," muttered Bell. Then aloud, "Nearly all the people are off the boat; let us get in, and have it over. There is our man looking for us too," and the sisters hurried to the side.

As usual, fear had outstripped danger; in fact there was no danger. Even Isabel Lavenham could find nothing to be nervous about in a broad, well-fenced gangway, compared with which the steamboat planks on which she had often stepped of yore were poor affairs.

Having seen her into the warm, bright saloon, Monica returned to discharge the porter, and then

lingered for a few moments in the fresher air, not sorry to be alone.

It occurred to her to tell Bell that she would remain outside during the crossing, provided Bell had no objection, no fears, and no discomfort.

Bell was acquiescent, and she did so. A few minutes afterwards she was ready to repent of having made the request.

She had moved to the side of the vessel, and from thence begun to watch idly the new stream of passengers crowd the little gangway and step aboard; and scarcely had she stood there a minute, ere, in the midst of the throng, a tall figure clad in a long, light coat, such as were in fashion at that period, came into view, and caused her heart to give a sudden plunge. She felt as if a knife had stabbed her.

Her first impulse was to turn round and fly to Isabel's side. Dorrien—for it was he—would probably remain without; most of the men were standing by the cabin-door in order to enjoy cigars in the outer air; and if she sought refuge within, Monica saw in an instant that she would be tolerably secure of escaping observation.

But she had only taken one step back, when she paused, aware that she had been already seen. It was too late.

Was she glad it was too late? She had perceived Dorrien start and stand still, then move forward involuntarily as one urged from behind; and she felt that he must know she had also seen him. She would not wait, or seem to wait, for him. Neither would she lead the way within. She walked slowly along to the far end of the boat, where all was comparative darkness, and where no one who did not wish to do so need follow.

There she stood still, breathing quickly, gazing into vacancy. She would not risk being claimed by any other acquaintance, although such a chance was not a probable one, being out of her own beat; but still, as Dorrien was crossing, others might be crossing, and the risk of accidental, hap-hazard encounters was precisely what she had come this way to avoid.

Had she come also in order to avoid any risk of meeting him? She supposed she had; but still, as he was

there, as he was near and knew that she was near, why, why did he not come to her?

This was always the way with Monica. She would be one moment proud, brave, indifferent—and then all at once her poor weak woman's nature would give way, and there would be hot tears in her eyes, and a dumb outcry in her heart.

Now, she heard footsteps pace backwards and forwards behind her, heard from minute to minute short conversations and laughter, heard the "By your leave," of the ferry sailors loosening ropes and removing encumbrances—then was aware the boat had swung loose, and on the breast of a rapid current was off in the darkness. Still no one addressed her by her name.

"It is about as dark a night as I ever crossed in," said a voice near.

"I was prepared to stop on the other side," said another.

"So was I," chimed in a third. "I had already wired home, meaning to have a jolly evening at the theatre. Then my fool of a manager came in and told me the river was clear. You may imagine how I blessed him."

"You were not half sharp," laughed one of the others. "You should have kept it dark that you knew, and been off up town before anyone had told you."

"My dear Bob, if the boats were running I had to come, and that's all about it—and so had you, for that matter."

There was a laugh at this.

Each had a domestic autocrat who did not accept excuses.

"Well, if I get drowned some night on this blessed boat," said Bob, presently, "I shall have the satisfaction of——hi, what's that? The fog has come down as black as pitch. We shall have an accident in grim earnest this time. 'Pon my word, I don't above half like it. Let us go to the middle of the boat, eh? I once had a bump against the landing stage," and the voices retreated in the distance.

"It *is* 'as black as pitch,'" murmured Monica to herself. "I am glad Bell is in the cabin. She has no idea what it is like outside. Not a light to be seen anywhere now."

There was neither light nor sound beyond the bewildering clang of endless bells and the bellowing of distant fog-horns; while the vibration of the paddles as the boat struggled stoutly to keep her course for another few minutes seemed the only signs of life around.

Then she overheard another dialogue:

"Think there's any danger, Tommy?"

"Danger? No. Beastly bad night, though. If there ever were danger, it would be on a night like this. It is these confoundedly rapid fogs that are down upon you before you know where you are, or where you have got to, that make the danger, such as there is. They are upon you in an instant. Did you notice how it came down just now, black as midnight? There is no time to stop the traffic. But after all, I have crossed every night for the past eight or ten years, and I never heard of any really fatal accident——" and again the speaker passed on.

"I wish, however, we were across," thought Monica. "Even if—*oh!*"—a sudden frightful shock, a reeling of the floor beneath her feet, she was thrown violently backwards, and would have fallen, but that she was, as it seemed, flung against the breast of some one standing just behind, who received and held her in his arms. "Oh, Harry!" she shrieked, "what is it?" She had known all along that Dorrien was there.

Dorrien was leaning against the curved end of the saloon, and was thus able to withstand the impetus, with which he might otherwise have been borne down.

"It is a collision," he said. "We have run into another boat."

"A collision—oh!" gasped Monica. "Are we"—clinging to him—"are we going down?" quivering from head to foot.

"I think not. I hope not. It was pretty violent, but," and he held her close, "the danger would be immediate, if there is any. I fancy we should know by this time."

"I know—I know."

Passengers now hurried past, talking and gesticulating.

"I say—are we free of her?" shouted Dorrien after some of them.

No answer.

"Any harm done?" he called next.

"Don't know," gruffly back.

"We are *not* free of her," roared another surly, terrified voice.

Dorrien held his peace. In his heart he was not very much alarmed, but he was unwilling to excite further the trepidation of timid feminine nature, and he perceived that the answers he was likely to get to any inquiries, were not such as were calculated to tranquillize.

The boat made a movement.

"We are sinking," murmured Monica, sick and cold with deadly terror. "Oh, Harry, we are surely sinking!"

This was the second time she had called him "Harry," He still encircled her in his arms.

Meantime the boat was shuddering from bow to stern.

"She is filling, is she not?" whispered Monica.

In reality the steamer was trying to back her engines, and shake herself loose of the smaller vessel into which she had run.

"It is the Tranmere boat," observed a passing voice now. "No damage done, they say; but we can't get clear of her. We are both swinging down with the tide."

"Swinging down, where?" said Monica, lifting her face at this. "Do they think the danger is past?" and Dorrien perceived that she made a faint effort to withdraw herself from his support.

"That has hardly yet been ascertained," replied he. Then, bending his head down to hers, "Monica," he said, in her ear.

She made no reply. Instinct told her what was coming.

"You called me by my name just now;" he paused.

"I—I did not know what I was saying."

"But you knew to whom you were saying it. How did you know that it was I? You never looked round. Were you——" his arms tightened round her—"were you thinking of me?"

"I saw you come in. I knew you were here. I—I——"

"—You knew, Monica, that wherever *you* were, there would *I* be. We ought never to have met again; but as we have met, I will say just this once the words that I had meant to keep to myself forever. They will tell you nothing—you know it already. You have known it all along. From the very first day that we met, *you knew* that I loved you."

She could not deny it.

"Do you also know," he went on bitterly, "that I dare not say more than this?"

"I know—Harry."

A woman's pity, mingling with a woman's love, prompted the last gently breathed addition. He caught it as a thirsty man snatches at a bubble. "Harry?" he echoed, and in the sheltering darkness strained her to his breast, and imprinted one passionate kiss upon her lips. "Oh, God, to be so near happiness!" he cried, "and to know it is all a dream—a dream," his voice dying away, his hold relaxing.

It was Monica who first lifted her head after this.

"Dear Harry," she murmured brokenly, "I will not pretend I do not understand you, nor—nor—that—I do not care for you. I could—I would—if it might have been," confusedly seeking to make her meaning plain without putting it into rigorous speech. "I am glad we have met—at least—yes, I *am* glad—only—let me go, now," still more softly; "it is lighter now, and see, we are almost at the landing place;—is not that the landing place? How did we get free? I had forgotten everything—I——" and she stood still, and for a single minute looked quietly and sorrowfully into his face. She was feeling as if she should never look thus upon it again.

He was not looking at her. He was afraid to look at her.

CHAPTER XXVII.

REMORSE.

Those who inflict must suffer, for they see
The work of their own hearts; and that must be
Our chastisement, or recompense.—COLERIDGE.

"You will take care of us, and see us off, will you not?" said Monica presently, with an instinctive desire to soothe the grief which was greater than her own. "We have no one with us, and we are not very good travellers. It would be very kind."

"Kind," he murmured, looking round with hungry eyes.

The parting hour was drawing on, and every moment was a boon.

"The people are beginning to go," suggested she, next. It seemed to her she had got another charge instead of an escort.

Dorrien released her hand.

Glancing towards him, she placed it softly within his arm. A great wave of remorse and tenderness poured in upon her soul, to the exclusion of every other feeling; or if there were room for another feeling, it was for that of reverence. This man with whom she had toyed and trifled, whose heart had been her plaything, and whose honor her sport, was capable of a depth and strength of feeling infinitely above and beyond anything she had ever yet experienced. Her own scarcely acknowledged, reluctantly recognized preference seemed a response so inadequate, so unworthy of the passion which had shaken him to his very centre, that she could but feel anew a prey to the bitterest humiliation, as she confessed to herself that she had been as a child or a fool in thus meddling with a matter so much beyond her.

She drew him forward, but she scarcely cared to address him. When he spoke to her, she answered humbly and timidly. She kept by his side, permitting him to render this and that little service, and accepting

the same with anxious gratitude. Whatsoever she fancied he would wish her to do, she did. Too well she knew there was no effort she could now make which would atone for, or efface the past.

As for him, he walked as a man to the scaffold. He had taken his farewell of all that made life dear, in that brief moment when he held Monica to his heart, and pressed a kiss upon her lips—and now he was but dimly conscious of passing events, and was almost indifferent even to the presence of his beloved.

It was this numb anguish which, betrayed upon his countenance, appalled Monica. Stricken with shame and unavailing regrets as she had already been, she had never until now realized the full extent of the havoc she had wrought.

The two therefore held their peace even from words of sorrow.

Neither the one nor the other, I am afraid, thought of poor Isabel, who had been faint with fright, and had been left to the ministrations of strangers.

Bell now appeared at the cabin door in much perturbation and resentment, which restoratives did more for her, it may just be remarked, than any of the more recognized remedies could have effected. She was prepared to be either indignant or alarmed as the case might be. If Monica had been neglectful, reproaches were on the tip of her tongne; if, on the other hand, Monica like herself had been frightened to death, what was to become of them both?

But the sight of Dorrien with her sister was the last for which Isabel's blue eyes had been prepared, and every other thought fled on the instant. What was he doing there? Had the meeting been a premeditated one?—If not, by what strange accident had it come about?

With swift recollection she called to mind Monica's elaborate arguments for adopting the tiresome and troublesome route which had nearly proved so disastrous? recalled how every objection had been overruled, and every fear disposed of. What had been the cause of such resolution and such obstinacy? About Dorrien her sister had always been mysterious, tantalizing—was Dorrien after all to—to——? She paused, and

a single glance at Dorrien's face answered the question. No, it was not the face of a happy lover she saw before her. She took his hand almost as silently as Monica might have done.

"Is Mr. Dorrien going by our train?" she inquired, and the inquiry was not made of him.

"He is going to see us into it," replied Monica, with like gravity. "Mr. Dorrien was crossing like ourselves, Bell, and we met just now—just as the boats came into collision. Were you afraid, dear? Were you hurt in any way?"

"Of course I was very much afraid, Monica. Who would not have been? I never felt such a shock in my life. We were all thrown from our seats; and then, directly they could, everyone rushed out of the cabin, leaving us poor creatures who could not go, to our fate. One kind old gentleman took care of me."

"We had better see to the luggage," said Monica, who thought she could hear this at another time. "Shall I show you our luggage?" to Dorrien; the prevailing uneasiness of inexperience affording an excuse for the appeal. "Our luggage is over there."

"Forward, ladies, forward, please," interposed one of the boat's crew. "The luggage will all be sent up, miss; it will meet you at the top," indicating with his forefinger; and in obedience to the mandate, the sisters and Dorrien crossed the gangway, and followed those in front, who were now proceeding up a gentle incline, which rose or sank according to the tide.

At the moment the tide was on the ebb.

These floating stages on the Mersey permit of boats landing and departing at all hours. The boats are broad, shallow, and raftlike; capable of considerable accommodation, and built very strongly; but only suitable for the very short distance they have to traverse between the vast seaport on the one hand and its prosperous and flourishing offshoot on the other. They fly backwards and forwards on the surface of the water, as though scarcely touching more than the summit of the wave. As there are many points of arrival and departure on the one bank, and only one regular landing-stage on the other, while the traffic is enormous, it may be understood how collisions like that above recorded are

not infrequent during the winter months, when sea fogs spring up rapidly—oftentimes, indeed, with such surprising swiftness that it is impossible to foresee them in time to prevent accidental encounters—the boats having perforce to ply at full speed in order to keep their bearings, and not be borne hither and thither according to the tide.

Serious accidents are, however, of very rare occurrence, and fatal ones have scarcely ever been recorded. The blows which such craft are capable of dealing each other are not of a nature to inflict irreparable damage, though the shocks experienced by collisions, or by running too smartly against the landing-stage on either side—another and frequent result of these winter fogs —are often sufficiently alarming.

Some years ago a passenger on one of these Woodside boats, in an agony of terror, on perceiving a collision inevitable, threw himself off, when half way between Liverpool aud Birkenhead, under the impression that his only chance of escape from certain destruction was to do so and swim for his life. He was rescued and laughed at—presently; but on many a dark night those who pass and repass on that watery way are glad to see the lights on the opposite side and not inclined to jest when those lights are obscured for any length of time. (N. B. But the writer is writing of twenty years ago; since then there have been many changes, and no one in these days need cross the Mersey who prefers to burrow beneath it. A submarine railway is now open.).

Owing to one delay and another our travellers did not enter the station from which they were to take their departure until the London train was in waiting, even although the platform was distant only a few minutes' walk from the turnstile at the top of the stage.

Perhaps they did not hurry themselves. It was something to have porters, payments, luggage, to look after; something to have inquiries to make on the one hand, and information to give on the other. Had there been no such demands filling up the time how terrible would have been each pause!

Arrived on the platform, Dorrien took their tickets, chose a carriage, gave necessary orders and fees, and

all done, stood before the door, unable to leave and, careless of pretext for remaining.

A truck with hot-water tins drew up behind him, and he was requested to step aside while these were inserted in the carriage. He did so without a word. The intruder vanished. He again resumed his place.

Isabel had ensconced herself in the furthest corner of the compartment, knocked up the arms of the seats, and pronounced her arrangements complete. Monica was seated by the open door.

Gradually she was becoming more and more timid in Dorrien's neighborhood. She respected the burden of his grief. She shrank from seeming to intrude upon it.

But necessity was urgent. If she did not now utter a word nor ask a question, there might never in all life come again the opportunity. Obviously there was more than appeared in her lover's overclouded brow and heavy lip. It struck her that, bad as things were, there might have been a gleam of hope even in such a parting—a rift even in this cloud. Why, then, such unrelenting gloom? Why such utter despair? A growing uneasiness mingled with curiosity caused her at length to accost him.

"Mr. Dorrien."

He leaned forward in an instant.

"If I thought I should not wound nor grieve you, I should like to say a commonplace word," said Monica, softly. "You must not hate me for it. I thought perhaps—I should like—I mean," with hurried breathing, "would you mind my saying that I shall always think of you as a friend? And you—will you think of me sometimes?" She got no further.

A faint bitter smile replied. Then, "Think of you?" he said; and she winced beneath the look accompanying the words.

"But I mean—if—if we should ever happen to meet," it seemed as if she must in desperation be more plain-spoken, beginning confusedly, "you would be able to meet me——" but here the speaker stopped in confusion.

Dorrien had raised his eyes with an air of surprise, a new surprise, one which had not hitherto been apparent in his demeanor.

"Do you not know, then?" he said.

"Know, Mr. Dorrien? What ought I to know? Is there anything to know?"

"Oh, nothing. Only this," in curt sentences. "I am leaving for Australia to-night."

She fell back in her seat. This, then, was the meaning of it all. This was his farewell forever. It was no wonder—no wonder; nothing was any wonder. She understood everything, comprehended everything, and bowed beneath the revelation. At that moment she began to love him.

"Yes, I am off to-night; I am starting now," he said. "I should have gone by this train, but now I won't—I can't, I dare not. I will take the next; and when we part here—in another few seconds—we shall never meet again. I came this way in order to avoid you, Monica. You perhaps——?" and he looked the rest. She saw it would have pained him to have known he had not needed to be avoided. She bent her head. Heaven, I think, forgave that mute acquiescence, and Dorrien looked a shade the happier for it.

"I thought that of course you would have heard," he proceeded in a hurried undertone. "It was arranged quickly; but news travels fast. I could not stop on here. I had to go somewhere and get rid of myself. We have a cousin—a wild, discreditable sort of fellow—Luke Dorrien, somewhere in Australia; and I like Luke. We were friends as boys; we shall suit each other now. If he can get me anything to do, I'll do it; if not we'll starve together. Anyhow, I have done with the old world, and can but try the New. And now Monica, dear Monica,"—he took her hand—"God bless you!" he whispered. The train began to move; a railway attendant took him by the elbow to pull him away; he wrenched himself from the man's grasp, stooped and kissed the hand he held; and the impress of that kiss seemed to Monica's excited and bewildered imagination as though it would never wholly pass away.

All through the weary hours which followed she lay back thinking, thinking. There was time to think now—time for anything now. All at once it seemed as if in the past lay every iota of interest or absorption. As

for the future—the future was nothing to her. What could the future do? What did it offer? Poverty, neglect, mortification, and deprivation. These poor girls had always indulged in a perfectly open and admitted avoidance of aught that was poor and shabby, dull and mean. True, in Lowndes Square there had been an undercurrent of shifts and strains, and occasional stintings and pinchings, against which they in their hearts had protested and rebelled; but on the surface all had been fair enough. They had never been obliged to do what their world would have looked askance upon. They had never been asked to go against the stream in matters of fancy or fashion. They had never had to wear old clothes.

Then at Flodden Hall, although the scene had shifted —and at first it had seemed shifted for the worse—there had been many and decided compensations. There had been solid, substantial comfort, flattering homage, and a rapid regaining of complacency under a certain hope and anticipation. Each had alike been shrewd enough to be aware that, once declared their uncle's heiresses, the world—even their own world—would smile upon them again, would indeed smile more indulgently than before. They had been in a fair way to be content just as the curtain fell once more; and this, be it observed, was apart from every other consideration, since we arereferring merely to the sentiments shared by both sisters.

But now, thrown again upon the wide world, with expensive tastes, luxurious habits, exacting whims—with no experience of self-denial, thrift, nor patience—misunderstanding economy, and loathing frugality—unable to do anything or to make their own way in any direction—what chance had they?

Even their beauty would suffer eclipse. Elegance of shape would not appear beneath ill-fitting garments, small feet and hands would pass unobserved when clumsily shod and awkwardly gloved.

"And who will do our hair?" cogitated Bell. She had silky brown hair, which when carefully dressed set off her pure white forehead and oval cheeks to great advantage. Monica's auburn waves needed less arranging; she had only to draw them back from temples

round which they clustered almost too thickly, to have all the setting her fair face required. She would often, even in Josephine's day, coil her own tresses; and Isabel, glancing at her as she lay back resting her uncovered head against the cushion, saw that no defter fingers were needed. Round and round the small shapely head were gathered the ruddy bands. Monica, pale and spent, with weariness and sorrow imprinted on her drooping lips, with wan cheeks and closed eyelids, looking almost ghastly in the light of the single lamp overhead—Monica had yet never looked more beautiful.

Not a single worldly care nor anxiety was troubling her mind. She had for the nonce done with apprehensions and futurity in every shape. Hence that tender expression.

Poor Isabel, racking her brains to conjecture how this or that would happen, how such and such an overture might be received, or contingency provided for, felt almost indignant with her sister for the peace into which it seemed Monica had entered. She had been sorry for Monica—sorry and pitiful, and had done her best to look away and see nothing, while Dorrien was by; but now that he had been left behind, she did wish that her sister would wake up, tell her what had happened, and resume something of the mood with which she had started.

Obviously Monica had no intention of so doing. She could be—she was—a considerate, affectionate sister: she had been all that was required as a tender and devoted nurse during Isabel's illness; and she was prepared to take on herself the brunt of the future as soon as the future should create its own demand;—but my heroine had a spirit of her own all the same. There was a line beyond which Bell could never pass with Monica. Fret and fidget as she might, she durst not whine aloud when tacitly condemned to hold her peace.

At length she composed herself to sleep, and slept by fits and starts for the rest of the way.

Then Monica opened her eyes, and gazed out into the blank, chill night. There was not a moment of it in which she was not living in another scene, beholding,

hearing, and feeling over and over again those looks, those touches, those trespasses which had awakened such a strange mingling of sensations such a tumult of emotions within her bosom.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WASPISH STINGS.

Such little wasps! And yet so full of spite!
For bulk mere insects—yet in mischief strong—TATE.

"WELL, she was a pretty creature, I will say that of Monica Lavenham."

Mrs. George Schofield sat and sighed in her easy chair the day after Flodden Hall had been deserted. "No wonder poor cousin Joseph was so set upon her," continued she after a pause. "She was enough to turn the head of any man. Oh, George," as her son entered, "I was talking to Daisy here about the Lavenham girls; have you heard about them? They're off, you know. Off last night, bag and baggage. Daisy has had a letter from Monica—a really nice, affectionate letter—written just before she started, and posted in London on their arrival there late last night. It must have been posted at the station. We sent for our letters this afternoon; and lucky we did, or we should have heard nothing till to-morrow, and people might have been talking to us, and we not knowing—but, however, no one has been here. I daresay you may have heard, though?" as he betrayed no surprise.

"I heard," he said, succinctly, and came and stood in front of the fire.

"Well, as I was saying to Daisy," proceeded his mother, with whom this was a favorite formula, "that Monica was a pretty creature. To see her fly up into her saddle was a sight in itself; and though I did feel that perhaps poor cousin Joseph made more fuss about the two of them than he need have done—like princesses of the blood royal, I am sure they were kept—but, however, 'tis ill speaking harm of the dead,—and to be sure they were his own sister's only children—and anyhow he has left them nothing."

No response. George stood still upon the hearthrug. He had not even taken off his hat and great-coat, and his newspapers and stick were in his hand. His mother, observing him, thought that George looked tired. Daisy, it must be confessed, thought only that his hat was stuck on the back of his head, and that she had often wished he would not stick it there when Dorrien was by. She had become painfully alive to her eldest brother's deficiencies, and often marvelled how it seemed he was himself so little aware of them. To come straight into his mother's drawing-room, hatted, gloved, and great-coated, with strong, dirty boots that left their marks upon everything with which they came in contact! To stand stupidly stock-still, taking no notice of his mother, nor of herself; to be full of his own tiresome affairs, as he always was; and caring about those of no one else, as he never did; to be listening to nobody, responding to nothing! She got up and left the room, out of patience with such surly, selfish doltishness.

As soon as she was gone, George moved a space nearer to his mother.

"Do you know what they say about Dorrien?" he began abruptly.

Mrs. Schofield started. Daisy had desired her to know nothing about Dorrien. She and Daisy had had a talk together on the subject. and had at length come to an understanding. Neither however had taken George into account.

"They say that he—and Monica——," and the young man stopped, as if he had said enough.

"Oh, he and Monica," rejoined his mother, feebly. ("Dear me! I wish Daisy would come in again," with some internal perturbation.) "Well, what about him and Monica?" proceeded she, after a momentary hesitation.

"Lionel Carnforth told me. Mother, did you know?" and she was subjected to a glance so searching that her discomfiture was at once penetrated.

"Well, yes, I knew; that is to say, I knew in a kind of way, George:" Mrs. Schofield shuffled in her chair: "I knew that there was something: and, at any rate, I knew that Daisy——"

"I thought he was on with Daisy," burst forth her son. "I was told so; you said so; everybody made out it was so. He used to be over here every day of the week, and I was bidden to get out of the way. Daisy used to try to keep me indoors when I came out in the evening, and all. If he was after Daisy, how could he be after—anyone else?" jerking off one of the mantle-piece ornaments with a sudden movement.

"Goodness gracious! George, what are you doing? Lucky for you that I was here. It would have broken all to pieces if I had not caught it," cried his mother, replacing the piece of china which had fallen into her lap. "That stick of yours——"

—"Never mind—never mind." He threw it down impatiently, and tossed his hat after it. "Tell me the truth about this business, will you? Is Dorrien to marry Daisy, or?——" And he looked the rest.

"It is all at an end between him and Daisy," replied Mrs. Schofield with emphasis and a suitably lowered tone; "and between you and me, George, I am not sorry for it. I had begun to feel squeamish about the Dorrien connection. Ever since that day we were over at Cullingdon I fancied a change in the young man's manner. And what is more, I fancied it in Daisy's manner too. She as good as confessed to me just now that I was right. She says she would rather keep close about it, and I am not to question her, but it is over and done with, and that's all about it. Of course I can say no more, and indeed I want to say no more. There is as good as he to be had any day, and Daisy has always her grandfather's money. I can't deny that I was pleased at first, and would have liked a girl of mine to be "my lady" well enough; but, George, that place of theirs is in dreadful need of repair, and I do assure you, George, I can't but think Sir Arthur and his lady would never have been so civil as they were to me and mine but that they thought so too."

"All of this is nothing," said he, frowning; "it is not what I want to know. I——,"

—"Why, it is just what you asked me about, my dear! You said these very words. "Is he on with Daisy?" or something of the kind. You would not have been best pleased if you had been kept in the dark."

"I *have* been kept in the dark—that is just what I have been. You never gave me so much as a hint of this before. If you had, I should have known what to think. Dorrien begins to play the fool with Daisy about the very time that Monica Lavenham appears on the scene. What does that mean?"

"Well, you know, George, she was a pretty creature. But to be sure Daisy is a pretty creature too. Only I suppose——"

"Oh! you 'suppose?' Do you *know* anything? Had you heard anything?"

"Heard? No. What should I have heard?"

His hands again roved among the china ornaments. She began to wonder at this restlessness, this impatience. Usually George was sulky and silent if out of humor. She could see that he was out of humor now, but it was not sulkiness which clouded his brow, nor did he appear disposed for taciturnity. ("Something has gone wrong with him," she concluded. "Dear me! Poor George! Now, I wonder what it can be that has gone wrong with him?") "Just tell me what you are in trouble about, my dear laddie," she was beginning, but she got no further.

"Who said I was 'in trouble'? I am not 'in trouble.' I don't know what you mean by my being 'in trouble,' he cried, angrily. "I ask a simple question, and can get no answer, and then you begin about my being 'in trouble.'"

"Well, I'm sure, George—but I don't understand you. I thought you looked vexed and out of spirits, and you keep worrying and worrying round those shepherdess figures. I wish you would let them alone—they will be broken as sure as can be; and you snap me up as short as anything because I give you a kind word!" The maternal accents ended in being aggrieved and reproachful.

"But I don't want a kind word, and what I do want is an answer," persisted he. "You beat about the bush, and tell me this thing and that, and the one thing I want to know is, what is the truth about Dorrien?"

"About Dorrien?"

"And—and Monica. They went away together last night, do you know?"

"No?" She started from her chair.

"Mind you, I have only Lionel Carnforth's word for it, and he is the biggest liar going, as everyone knows. But he swore solemnly that he had met another fellow in the morning who had seen them; so I suppose there must be something in it. They crossed to Birkenhead—crossed in that awful fog last night—and went to London by the next train. Carnforth swore that it was a fact, and—and added a lot besides."

"Well, I wouldn't have believed it of Monica!" ejaculated his mother.

"Nor would I—but ——"said George gloomily, and paused.

"But what?"

"I came out with young Smith, who goes to the Carnforths sometimes; and he and Lionel were saying things to each other. It wasn't very pleasant to hear them."

"Lawks! what did they say, George?" It was not in human nature not to sit up on the edge of the chair at this. Consumed with curiosity, Mrs. Schofield's very cap-strings betrayed the feeling.

"They said—I wish you had been there instead of me, perhaps you would have liked it better—they said a great deal that I could have knocked down their throats again; and the worst of it was, that they appeared to take for granted that I knew as much as they did."

"But what was it about, George?" still very curious.

"About? This fine gentleman of Daisy's and—and the girl who has supplanted her. It was Monica Lavenham who took Dorrien away from Daisy. She—he—it appears everyone knew it, and talked of it—everyone but ourselves. They say that one time they met—it was the evening before cousin Joseph died—it was at the Carnforths'—Smith was there—it was that evening that he and Lionel Carnforth were talking about."

"And Monica and Mr. Dorrien?"

"Yes. Monica and Mr. Dorrien. Mother, if you had known anything of this you might have told me."

She looked up in amazement at his tone, and a terrible idea all at once occurred to her.

Have told him? *Him?* Why have told *him?* What

was it to George? It had been of Daisy she had had to think. No one had ever supposed—how could anyone have supposed?—that this unfortunately crossed love affair could be anything to Daisy's brother. He had never liked Dorrien, and could be acquiescent in the cessation of Dorrien's visits—he might have seen for himself that the end had come. Why then should he now turn on anyone and complain that he had not been told?

All of this she could have explained and demonstrated but for one thing—the tone of her son's voice. It was thick and husky, the utterance of one struggling with suppressed feeling, and when arrested by this, she had her attention drawn to his air, his countenance, his attitude, she began to perceive the truth. The truth was so dreadful to her that she was literally shocked into silence. She was thankful that, Daisy coming in, George went out, and the colloquy was at an end.

Mrs. Schofield beckoned her daughter to the side of her chair.

"Daisy," she whispered—then peering round and round to make sure no one else was in the room—"Daisy, I don't know but that I'm wrong—but if I'm right I—oh! don't come to do the room yet, Charlotte," as a housemaid entered; "just wait five minutes, and I'll be gone upstairs. Has the gong sounded? Well, I did not hear it. We'll go directly," waiting till the door closed again. Then once more, holding fast her daughter's arm, and screening her mouth with the other hand—

"Daisy, did George love Monica?" Monica's name was almost inaudible.

"Oh! I knew that long ago," said Daisy, readily.

"You knew it and never told me! The poor boy!"

"It was a ridiculous idea!" said Daisy, who was now to prove herself a woman and a sister. "It was really too absurd of George. He never spoke to her—she never spoke to him—or at least if she did it was only to laugh at him and make game of him. It used to put me out to see them together, and I could not think how George could be so foolish."

"Well, foolish? If Monica Lavenham was good

enough for Mr. Dorrien, I don't see how you can call George foolish."

"My dear mother! It was not she who was not good enough." Daisy laughed aloud. "I should never blame any man where Monica was concerned. But to think of *George*!"

"Well, George—why not George? George is as good as other people, I suppose," rejoined George's mother, with very natural asperity. "I am sure I don't know what you mean by looking like that, and saying "*George*!" in that tone of voice. I am sure I for one am very sorry for poor George, if it is so," subsiding into a sigh; "and if you had seen him just now fretting and fidgeting from one leg to another, and glooming at me as if I had been to blame for it all, you would have been sorry too."

"Oh! well, but after all," protested Daisy, who, clear-sighted and noble-minded about her own love-story, had, it must be confessed, but scant sympathy with what seemed to her nothing short of a parody upon it; "after all, he ought never to have thought of such a thing. He might have known—as if Monica would have even looked at him, even for a moment dreamed of him! George!" And a vision of George with his umbrella, his newspapers, his hat on the back of his head, and his pale, dull face beneath—George stumping home at the close of his day's work, with soiled collar and cuffs, with not unfrequently railway smuts on cheek and chin (smuts had a knack of adhering to George's face—he had not the cool fine skin of Dorrien)—all this arising before the speaker's eye as she spoke, made the unfortunate subject of her cogitations form such a contrast to the brilliant Monica, that in spite of herself she once more ejaculated the obnoxious word in the obnoxious accent before she was aware.

"For goodness' *sake*, don't repeat that again!" cried Mrs. Schofield, who, between son and daughter, had had about as much as she could bear, already. "I never heard the like of it! A sister to speak like that of a brother! Fie upon you! say I, not to stand by you own, let who will be the other. I am sure I would not breathe a whisper against any one of the seven of you; but you seem to take a pleasure in be-littling us

all nowadays. 'George,' indeed!" fanning her heated face with a newspaper, and jerking her chin indignantly about.

Daisy had seldom seen her mother moved to such an extent.

Some daughters would have caressed away the frown; but the Schofield family were not demonstrative. It was not their way to speak softly nor to move gently. It was only once or twice in a lifetime that the real warmth within could emerge into tenderness without. Daisy had been tender, exquisitely tender, and gentle, and dignified in the great trial of her life,—but in every-day matters she was still the same Daisy that she had ever been. . Accordingly she replied to the above, I am sorry to record, with a brisk "Nonsense!" and though secretly a little ashamed, made a pretence of being absolutely unaware of having said or done anything to be ashamed of.

"There you go! 'Nonsense!'" rejoined Mrs. Schofield. "It is no 'Nonsense' to him, I can tell you. I call it downright unfeeling of you, Daisy. One would think that *you*, at any rate——"

"Now do listen to reason, mother." Daisy spoke a little hurriedly, having no desire to see the conversation take the turn obviously impending. "Do just think of it for yourself. George, at his age——"

"How old is she, pray?"

"That is nothing. Women are always older than men. And as for Monica, she is years and years older than George in everything *but* years. She thinks of him as a mere boy—if she thinks of him at all. He has never made the smallest attempt to show himself as anything else. A mere boy, and sometimes a very rude boy. He was often particularly disagreeable when the Lavenhams were by. I used to wonder what made him so."

"And yet you say you knew about his caring for Monica long ago?"

"I found it out, somehow. I am sure I hardly know how."

She paused. On a sudden it flashed upon her that she had known because of certain signs perceptible only

to certain eyes, because of answering echoes to these within her own breast.

"But Monica did not even like George," continued Daisy eagerly. "You know he is not the sort of man she has been accustomed to. George is very good in his way, and of course *we* understand him and are fond of him,—but to strangers and visitors he never shows off well. He is tiresome, and stupid, and mopish. He never throws himself into what is going on, nor takes any interest in what other people are doing. It is always 'Let me go my own way' with him. He never cares about making himself look nice, but is just as dowdy when people are with us as when we are alone, and says that it 'does not matter,' and that he is 'well enough.' I have tried over and over again to make him better. He says he does not want to be better. He won't even try to improve. He only grows cross and sullen if I begin to speak about it."

"I daresay. No young man likes to be lectured." Mrs. Schofield could listen no longer. "If that is all the comfort you have got to give poor George, I must say I don't wonder that he flies out at us all. He might have expected a little sisterly feeling from *you*, Daisy."

Daisy colored. There was no parrying this second homethrust.

"Was it this he was talking to you about when I came in?" she inquired, after a silence during which Mrs. Schofield's kind heart was already repentant.

"Yes, poor dear! Daisy, I am sorry I said that. For after all, Daisy, you are a good girl, and have had your, trials; but when I think that things have gone cross with both of you——," and tears stood in her honest eyes.

Daisy said nothing.

"That was what he was telling me, and hard work he had to get it out at last," continued her mother, in a sort of husky whisper. "I am sure I thought we were never going to get to the point—and to be sure, we never did quite get to it; but the way in which he said, '*You might have told me*,' shaking his head from side to side—oh, dear! oh, dear! it fairly cut me to the heart."

"What was it that you 'might have told' him?"

"About Monica and Mr. Dorrien, of course."

"Do you mean that he had never 'told' himself? That he had never seen anything?"

"Oh! I am sure he had never seen anything."

"Then he is a—— who had told him, then? How had he found out, if he had not the wit to find out for himself?"

"Lionel Carnforth and the other young men were talking. And oh! I forgot. You have not heard the last thing, Daisy. They do say that Mr. Dorrien went off to London with the two girls, yesterday. He was seen to cross to Birkenhead in their boat, and afterwards he was with them in the station. No doubt they went all the way together. Not a word of this did Miss Monica say in her letter, though. Now I did not think Monica was sly, whatever she was."

"The letter she wrote to me was written before they started," said Daisy.

"Aye, to be sure; but they had engaged to meet him then."

"*That* I am sure they had not."

"Well, Lionel Carnforth said so."

"Lionel Carnforth!" repeated Daisy with contempt. It was noticeable that everyone in speaking of the Carnforths invariably did so with the same intonation.

"Oh! but there was another of George's friends, a young Smith—you know, old Tom Smith's son—he goes to the Carnforths', and he had been at that dinner-party—*you* know?"

Daisy nodded.

"And he gave such an account of it. I could see by George's face what an account of it he had given."

"Mother"—it was another Daisy who now spoke—"mother, we need not go into that old matter. It is past and done with. Monica and Mr. Dorrien are parted now, and parted forever. If Monica ever injured me, ever did me any wrong, ever——"—she bit her lip—"I forgive her from my heart," she subjoined after a moment's pause. "She is—she has been bitterly punished; but I forgave her even when I did not expect any punishment. She did not know what she was doing. She——"

"—She knew well enough she was behaving badly to poor George, anyway."

"But what I do not believe, and what I never will believe, unless I hear it from her own lips," proceeded Daisy, wrapped in her own train of thought, "is that this was a premeditated meeting yesterday. I know she did not mean to see him—I know he did not wish to see her. Since there can be no marriage, they are better apart; and a strange, almost clandestine meeting —Monica would never have stooped to it. She could have met him openly any day, if it had been only to say 'Good-bye.' Why should she not? But she thought it best not. They must forget each other now."

She stopped abruptly.

"Ah! well, it has been a bad business all through," concluded Mrs. Schofield, rising heavily to her feet. "But I do say, I am sorry for poor George," letting fly a Parthian shot as she left the room.

CHAPTER XXIX.

LONDON LIFE VIEWED FROM LONDON LODGINGS.

Poverty makes people satirical—soberly, sadly, bitterly satirical.—
FRISWELL.

It was nearly twelve o'clock when our travellers arrived at their London lodgings, and too tired and dispirited to be observant, they found the general appearance of everything satisfactory, and the meal which had been prepared, appetizing.

But the morning showed all in a different light.

To be sure the rooms were not more dirty and disorderly than such abodes usually are, but they looked insufferably small, dull, and ill-furnished to eyes lately accustomed to surroundings which, if not invariably in the best of taste, were at all events as handsome and substantial as an elongated upholsterer's bill could make them. The apartments at Flodden Hall had moreover been arranged so as to admit abundance of light; Mr. Schofield liked to see into every nook and

corner of his carvings and gildings; and while this had at first been a drawback in the eyes of his nieces, eventually they had come to find other rooms with less noble windows heavy and uninteresting.

Cullingdon had of course been excepted; but then Cullingdon, with its long, narrow, mullioned casements, had been a spot by itself; its ivied turrets and terraces had competed with no other domain in the neighborhood, and its lofty arched roofs had entered into no comparison with their modern ceilings.

Of course, Flodden Hall, and Bingley Hall and all the other halls about had been vulgar as compared with Cullingdon, but they had also been mavellously comfortable. Even of Bingley Hall Monica now thought with tenderness, when its spacious suites rose in the retrospect, as she called to mind that memorable evening when she had seen the sportsmen advancing in the distance through a vista of open doorways; and when, their goal reached, the one who had at first threatened to be a recusant had paid her his open, bold, defiant court, in a way that had made all others stand aloof.

Repent as she might, there would always be a warm corner in her heart for the Carnforths' ample saloons which had afforded space for such isolation and devotion.

And Monica and Bell had learned to alter their opinion even of their own more modest mansion in the mercantile neighborhood. People must indeed be hard to please if they cannot live contentedly in a house which has absolutely no blemishes in point of convenience or comfort; which is warm or cool, according to requirement; which is perfectly ventilated, without the suspicion of a draught; and whose dining-room faces the setting sun.

Not an apartment in Mr. Schofield's villa but was arranged so as to suit some hour of the day. Even the turns of the staircase and the windows on the landings had been thought out with care and turned to account. Broad, shallow steps, velvet pile, and gigantic brass rods had but ill prepared our sisters for the rickety, odorous little flight of stairs by which they had to ascend and descend in Albion Street.

The wall-papers looked unutterable things at them. There were grimy patches near the doors, as though that locality had been used as a resting-place for an endless succession of weary chambermaids.

There were holes and darns in the carpets, castors were off table-legs, which were propped up by adroit contrivances, and springs were broken in the most spacious and inviting-looking of the easy chairs. The little sofa was as hard as if it had been a bare board.

All of this was not, of course, discoverable at the first glance. A new-comer would say, as the few who came to see the Miss Lavenhams did say, "What nice lodgings! What a cosy little sitting-room!" but the poor girls soon found out that one can look tolerably cosy without by any means feeling so.

"A good fire goes a great way," Monica would aver, and in consequence she always kept up a good fire—piling on the coal, which was excellent coal, and gave forth long bright jets of flame when stirred. Furthermore, she and Bell soon effected a revolution in regard to crochet, antimacassars, and the like; they had plenty of pretty things and made use of them, but they could not make the furniture what it was not. No amount of elegant drapery could stuff cushions and repair springs.

"And our bedroom is so very dark and dingy," Bell would murmur disconsolately. "It is dreadfully bare, too; we have literally nowhere to hang our dresses. There is neither hanging cupboard nor wardrobe; and as for the chest of drawers, we have each one chest of drawers, and three of my frocks nearly fill mine. The washing-stands are still worse. I really dislike getting up in the mornings."

"Now what is Bell grumbling about over there?" Monica interposed one day when Bell had reached this point, her auditor being an old friend who had come to Albion Street for lack of something better to do, when passing through London on her way to the Riviera. "If you listen to her, my dear Mary, she will grumble solemnly on all day long. Bell likes to drone. It is her music. She droned when we went to Flodden Hall; she drones now."

"I never droned in Lowndes Square."

"Oh, but I think you did, my dear!"

Miss Mary Howard, the visitor laughed a little at the remembrance. "Bell generally had some little grievance. "Bell generally had some little grievance or other when I used to come to Lowndes Square, as far as I remember, had she not, Monica? By the way, how are your uncle and aunt? Still abroad?"

"Oh, yes, for the winter."

"That is why we are here," cried Bell, rather eagerly.

"It is quite possible that aunt Fanny may be well enough to come home in the spring, and then, of course, we cannot tell what will be done. So Monica and I thought we had better just set up house for ourselves," she added, hoping devoutly that Monica would say nothing to such a statement.

Nor did Monica. She was not a saint. She had only just begun to be honest; and so, though well aware that a coloring was being thrown upon their present mode of life which the facts of the case would scarcely bear out, she told herself she was not obliged to be disagreeable and contradictory.

In her heart she was perfectly sure that to receive her sister and herself once again as members of their family circle was the last idea likely to occur to Colonel and Mrs. Lavenham. People who are selfish at the beginning of a separation, are seldom less so when separation has done its work. Their aunt had written a languid, conventional epistle, in which her own and her husband's continued invalidism was dwelt upon at full length, and which contained a somewhat pointed reference to the expense of hotel life, the ruinous charges of continental doctors, &c., &c.

Very few sentences had disposed of her niece's bereavement; it had been "a sad event"; Mrs. Lavenham sincerely trusted they had not "suffered from the shock": she supposed they would remain among their relations in the north, where they had met with so much kindness: and she begged they would let her and their uncle know when their plans were settled.

"It was a pity we told her of the kindness," Bell had reflected, ruefully.

She and Monica, stung by the contrast between the cool abandonment of their first guardian and the wholehearted devotion of their second, had sounded Mr.

Schofield's praises in every letter from Flodden Hall, with a double sense of pleasure in doing so. They had —or, at least, Monica had—liked to give vent to her gratitude, as well as hope that the ardor of her expressions would nettle the recipients who might read between the lines, and perceive that the young relations whom they could thus cast off at a moment's notice were not so blind but that they could mark a difference, and note a distinction.

They had not been allowed to perceive whether or not the arrow thus sped had found a mark. Colonel and Mrs. Lavenham had merely expressed gratification at all they heard; and, indeed, they had probably only experienced the same, for there are people who are entirely indifferent to all such considerations as being beloved and respected, especially by those whom they have done with, and from whom they expect no more; and accordingly, when a reply arrived from Monte Carlo, where the elderly pair were already settled for the winter at the time of Mr. Schofield's death (or, at least, at the time they heard of it, ten days later, since no one had cared to write before), there had been an obvious underlying strain of congratulation on the fatal event having happened, since it had happened at all, after Monica and Isabel had become known to the Schofield connection.

"They are all as rich as Jews up there," Colonel Lavenham told his wife in private. "No doubt the girls will get a good share of the money, somehow. We did the right thing when we shunted them off to Liverpool; we were in the nick of time: now they have taken hold there, and can look out for themselves. It was as good as binding them apprentices to a trade, sending them to Uncle Joseph—ha! ha! ha! Certainly it was a pity Joseph hopped the twig," more seriously. "I had meant to run up there some day, and pay him a visit; and I feel sure we should have been the best of friends. My 'brother-in-law,' you know. Oh, it should have been 'brother-in-law,' or anything else, so long as he took the girls off our hands; and the old fellow was so decent about it, so uncommonly handsome, I may really say, that I could have put my feet under his mahogany, and drunk his

'43 port with the very greatest satisfaction. Now, my dear Fanny," the Colonel had proceeded, "whatever you do, not a word to those two about returning to London. London must be a tabooed place to them henceforth. They must stay where they are; that must be the first thing to make plain. They have got into the Schofield swim, and in the Schofield swim they must remain. I hear there is a young Schofield—he is probably the head of the firm now—why should he not do for one of them? Anyhow, there are lots of other young merchant princes gaping for wives like Monica and Isabel. It would be the very ruin of those two to take them away from such advantages; and so I must beg you to be careful what you say. Liverpool must be everything to them—London nothing. That's the point to make. Keep them out of London by hook or by crook—by fair means, or foul. We may—ahem! —we may return to London ourselves some day."

His nieces were already there when the letter, carrying out these instructions, reached them.

Monica saw through it at a glance. A sarcastic smile curled her lips as she read. "Oh, you need not be afraid, good people!" she cried, apostrophizing the document. "We shan't trouble you. We know now what to expect from you. Our 'Schofield relations,' forsooth! Our 'Schofield relations' were a thousand times better and kinder to us than ever our Lavenham relations have been. We are supposed to settle down among our 'Schofield relations,' are we? I—no, I won't say I wish we could have done so, but it is something to feel that *they* wished it. *They* did not send us away; *they* would not have written a cold, cruel letter such as this. Oh, poor uncle Schofield! what would he have felt if he had read these set phrases about himself? He who was the dearest, the best, the only friend to us in our extremity, to be disposed of in a formal sentence or two! That terrible, terrible death which befell him, to be called a 'sad event'! Not a word of real sympathy, or sorrow. Well, sorrow, of course, aunt Fanny could not be supposed to feel, but she might have known that *we* were sorrowing, and have felt a little for *us*. I do not believe she had one single twinge. She would say! 'Dear me!' and sip her wine and water,

and ring for something or other she had forgotten to bring downstairs, before finishing my letter. I know; I have seen her. When her own brother was lying dangerously ill, hanging on from day to day, she used to stop in the middle of reading the morning's accounts to pour herself out her second cup of tea! She would do the same if uncle Lavenham were dying; so would he if she were. They have no hearts; they do not know what hearts are. And if we, Bell and I, had gone on living with them, we should have grown like them. It is true that we despised what we saw, and it often made us indignant and contemptuous; but that was because we were young, and had still about us some remnants of human nature as it is planted in childhood. We should have outgrown that: we were on the high road to it."

She paused, then spoke more firmly, spoke aloud though no one was by. "Thank God, we were stopped in time. We have had an awakening; and I am glad—yes, glad," emphatically, "that it came; and that it came in the shape it did. This letter confirms it. If uncle and aunt Lavenham had written warmly, lovingly—written begging us to join them—or even claiming us, on their return to London, we should have accepted such an invitation as a matter of course. Poor Bell, I am afraid, was counting upon it. She is in tears upstairs now. She begins to realize what we have to expect. But I? —I rejoice: I am free: I see myself—and her—beginning a new life, untrammelled by old ties and teachings. We shall learn together what the better way is like, and perhaps some day—some day"—her voice sank —"we shall begin to tread it."

"You know I could not have believed they would really write like that," said Isabel, coming downstairs with swollen eyelids. "I took it for granted they would say *something*. It seemed as if they could not *help* saying something. I had made up my mind that we should have to be here all the winter; and that we should have to be very poor, and have no carriage, and do without Josephine; but I thought it would not really so very much matter as long as hardly anybody else was in Town. We could always have given the excuse that we were only here while uncle Lavenham and aunt Fanny

were abroad; and made out that it was rather fun living alone, and all that; and it really might have been fun if it had been done for fun, don't you see, Monica? But if this is to be *our life*——" and again her eyes swam, and she looked round with an expression that filled her sister's orbs also.

Monica felt this would not do.

"It is rather dark just ahead," she began, but in spite of a desire to say more, could find no utterance for another word at the moment.

"To live in lodgings—*always!*" murmured Bell.

No rejoinder.

"Monica, how much have we exactly?"

"Three hundred a year, between us."

"And had we nothing, absolutely nothing, from uncle Schofield?"

"Absolutely nothing. You know how it was. He had meant to leave us everything; he died before he had arranged anything."

"Well, they might have given us some of it, Monica."

Monica smiled a little. "Whom do you mean by 'they?'" she said. "We could not very well have gone to the beneficiaries—how I did hate that word, when it came over and over again in the will!—and said to them, 'Give back your ill-gotten gold—it only came to you by a fluke,'"—

"—Oh, Monica, how can you talk like that!"

"I talk like that, my dear sister, by deep design. Believe me, I am at heart a gloomy, embittered, soul-maddened creature"—(she was now herself again),—"but if I give way to the stormy billows within, they would presently rise into a hurricane—a tempest—a tornado," suitably declaiming and attitudinizing, "which would sweep all (*molto crescendo*) before it! Heigho! I wish it would sweep this chimney!"

Isabel could not choose but laugh, as a gust of soot descended at the moment, and the bathos was irresistible. "That's right; laugh again, my dear," said Monica, in a more natural tone. "Now we shall get on. A fig for fashion and folly! We are going to be independent young ladies, living prudently within our means. We shall see London from a new point of view. There

are great sights to be seen in all directions, which we should never have beheld to the end of our days, but for this chance. We should never have penetrated where we can now penetrate. We will 'do' our London, Bell. We have 'done' Paris and Rome, and Venice, and Florence; but we should never have 'done' our own London from Lowndes Square. I want to see, oh, so many places, and find out about so many things! If we cannot have one side of the cake, we will eat away at the other. And I can tell you one thing, my dear Bell, the people who *are* in Town in the winter will be a great deal more glad to see us, and will have far more time for us, than they would have in the summer. I fancy we shall find ourselves in request at the present moment. We are not going to shut ourselves up; don't you be afraid. We will make a round of calls presently, and see who's where, and what they mean to be to us? There are *some* nice people everywhere—even aunt Fanny knew a few. I think the Belmonts were nice. Oh, the Oxendens were very nice! Lady Skipworth was not half bad. I will put down the names and addresses—now, dear me, what shall I do about the addresses? Surely I know them. I used to call them out, one after another; but it is tiresome," musing. "I am afraid, I am really afraid I shall be at sea now. What a pity we did not think of taking aunt Fanny's visiting book away with us. But, of course, we never dreamed of needing it so soon again."

"No, we never dreamed of needing it so soon again," echoed Bell, brightening under the idea. "Monica, do you remember how you laughed at me for saying we might be in Town next season? You see I was right after all. We really shall be in Town next season."

"Well, yes, in Town," said Monica, glancing at her sister furtively. "It was not precisely this I meant by being 'in Town.' But, however, as Mrs. Schofield would say—Bell, have you noticed how she clings to that 'but, however,' whenever she is on the full trot of conversation? It is her plank by which she steps from one subject to another. She whips it up under her arm, and carries it off to the next point, and down it goes, and she is away over it, and in the middle of

her next sentence before you know what she is up to. 'But, however,' Bell, my dear, here we are, and here we have got to stay. I think I made that remark once before, when we arrived at Flodden Hall. Ah! poor Flodden Hall! we little thought—'but, however,' I am going to run away and dress to go out now, Bell, and you had better come with me. If we do not catch the little sunshine there is on a November day we shall repent when night comes."

"It is always night here," murmured her sister, under her breath.

She thought Monica did not catch the words, but Monica did.

CHAPTER XXX.

FINDING FRIENDS.

Friends are much better tried in bad fortune than in good.—ARISTOTLE.

ALAS! Scarcely a single personage of Mrs. Lavenham's acquaintance was in London in mid-November, and very few were expected much before the following Easter. The Lavenhams had only cultivated intercourse with people of fashion, people of their own sort; idlers who were of no use to the world, and who had therefore no reason for dwelling where the world's chief business is carried on.

Accordingly the houses which Monica and Isabel had been wont to frequent were now fast closed, and the poor girls turned from one and another with ever decreasing expectations and anticipations. They had put on their new mourning, and it suited them. Walking suited them also. Going by the Underground Railway to Sloane Square, they had emerged among familiar scenes on a clear, frosty afternoon, and their spirits had risen under the prospect of tripping briskly from house to house, and being welcomed, at any rate, at some.

At not a single door did they gain admittance. The one or two acquaintances who were in residence, were

out; but by far the greater number of dwellings were deserted.

"Oh, this is dreadful!" said poor Bell, at last. She was tired out as well as bitterly disappointed. "It seems so strange, so odd to be going about like this. Exactly as if we were being turned away from every place.

"Nonsense!"

"Nonsense. if you like, but you need not be so sharp. I only said it seemed as if we were. We have gone all round this square, and round Belgrave Square, and Eaton Square. We have been up and down Eaton Place."

"Never mind where we have been."

"But I am tired, Monica. I cannot walk much more. Oh, if we only knew one good house to go to, where we could be *sure* of being let in and finding people at tea!"

"I know one," Monica began, then hesitated and considered. "I did not mean to go to them, "I am afraid," she said; "but, Bell, there are the Rowlands."

"The Rowlands?"

"Yes. Do you not remember that they said we should always be welcome in Queen's Gate?"

"Queen's Gate? Where is Queen's Gate?"

"No great distance. A shilling hansom. Shall we go? You know we always liked the Rowlands."

"But what are they doing here?" said Bell. "I liked them, of course. I liked them down at uncle Schofield's, but I never thought of their being in London. How did you remember they came to London. I am sure I had forgotten: indeed, I do not think I ever knew they did."

"I remember, because I was surprised when they first told me. The house is their own, and they come to it regularly—at least, some of them do. It struck me as being rather a bright idea. You know what a large family there is. Well, some of them can always manage to be here, to make a home for the one—the father or the eldest son—who has to be in London. One or other has always to be here, Mrs. Rowland told me. Merchants and those sort of people often have two places at work at once," proceeded she, feeling very wise. "Uncle Schofield said so. Now, Bell, what shall

we do? If we call on these Rowlands it means that we are willing to take up again the threads we dropped when we left Lancashire. We have no need to call. I daresay they would never expect it. And, of course, they are not to know we are here. But somehow—I—what do you think?"

"Oh, I think we had better go, Monica."

"You will be nice and pleasant, if we do? No airs, Bell?"

"What would be the use of 'airs' with the Rowlands?" muttered Bell.

"Of what use are they with anybody?" added Monica, to herself. One of her new experiences was that some folks are not as simple as one would think.

A hansom was hailed, and the sisters drove to Queen's Gate. It was all right this time; the door was thrown back with a swing, and a warmly lit-up hall within looked tempting to the two wistful pairs of eyes which had, in hunting phrase, drawn so many covers blank that afternoon.

"Oh, they are in; I am so glad!" whispered Isabel, with a sigh of satisfaction. "We had better keep this hansom, had we not? We might not find another just when we want to come away."

Her sister thought so too. The poor things had never been used to economize, and the man was kept waiting an hour. This taught them a lesson. I doubt if they ever kept a hansom at anyone's door again.

Certainly they did not at the Rowlands. But we will return to this first call.

Preceded into a lofty saloon, nobly appointed and arranged, the first sight which met the Miss Lavenhams' eyes was a little picture of fireside comfort, which had the effect of an oasis in what it would have been hard to term a desert, but which might have passed for one for lack of a better simile. Screened in on either side was an enormous fire, whose glowing mass shone reflected in all the steel and brass around; in front, and almost upon the broad hearthrug, were several small tables, well laden with silver and china, containing materials for tea temptingly set out; and beside these tables there stood up on their entrance two people

who had evidently been disturbed, but not unwillingly disturbed, by their entrance.

They recognized Ernest and Gertrude Rowland, the eldest son and daughter of the house, who, it presently appeared, were the only occupants of the town mansion at the present date.

"How very kind of you to come!" said Miss Rowland, while her brother set chairs, and all drew round the tea-tables. "I am so glad we were at home. Ernest and I nearly always are at home at this hour, as we have our tea and talk together now, and sometimes we go out afterwards; but we went out earlier to-day, it was so fine, and Ernest was able to get away. I am so glad we went," she added.

"We are very glad too," murmured Monica, and "Very glad," softly echoed her sister. Each had a curious sensation at the moment. Bell, I think, was saying to herself, "If you only knew *how* glad!" while her sister was experiencing a more complicated feeling. She had, as she had said, liked the Rowlands when at Flodden Hall; she had exempted them from her wholesale contempt of the surrounding neighborhood: and Dorrien's acquiescence had confirmed her penetration. But it must be confessed that she had only beheld them superior by comparison, and that, had fortune smiled upon herself, she would in all probability have neither advanced in friendship nor in intimacy. Therefore she had almost a sense of guilt in being thus welcomed, and in having it supposed that she and her sister had gone out of their way in seeking a welcome. If the finer people had been at home and friendly, would they ever have remembered Queen's Gate? It was only in consequence of having been turned away from the last doorstep, and of its being a toss-up whether they should go home to their scanty lodgings, weary and tealess, or should make one more trial in a less genteel quarter, that the latter quest had been undertaken.

The cordial tone and beaming eye of her youthful hostess smote Monica now with a sense of compunction.

It was compunction, however, which swiftly gave way to more pleasurable emotions. She heard with real satisfaction that the brother and sister were settled down for the winter; that they were not going off to

this place or that, as was nearly everyone else whom she and Bell had met;—and she found the two in themselves all that was agreeable, and more than agreeable. There was a positive eagerness in their reception of the sisters' communications regarding themselves, an alacrity in their responses, and a quiet, yet marked goodwill in their whole demeanor, which could not have been got up at a moment's notice. Evidently she and Isabel must have been liked before, and liked for their own sakes. This touched her; what had she done, or what had Isabel done to make these people like them? In looking back upon the past, Monica could not but reflect that they had done little enough in life to make anybody like them. The most that could be said of them was that they had done no harm, and even that, she cried to herself with a start, could not be said of *her*.

But here were these two, this son and daughter of their uncle's old neighbors, who had only met his nieces a few times, on which occasions Monica could not recollect being or doing anything particular—(and when she had certainly received no remarkable impressions of any sort herself)—here they were with their outstretched hands, their unaffected smiles, their interested and sympathetic inquiries—it was too much. She found herself telling Gertrude this thing and that, consulting her about divers little troubles, and frankly admitting the very facts of her new life which she would most carefully have guarded from another listener. There was something she could not resist in the kind face before her.

"I am sure you will be very happy and comfortable, if you are like Ernest and me," said Gertrude presently. "We are so happy together that, if I must confess it, we are always a little bit sorry when all the rest come up and flood the house. It is very naughty of us, is it not? But London is so quiet and peaceful just now; one can do what one likes; go where one likes; and see the things and the people one really wishes to see. Do you not find it so?"

"I don't know," said Monica, simply. "I never was in London in November before."

"You are sure to like it. In the season it is always

such a rush. One never gets anything done. Now, one has time for everything."

"Oh, time—yes," said poor Monica, with rather a quavering smile. "I don't suppose Bell and I will feel the want of time," and she caught her breath just as she was about to add avowals that in a cooler moment she might have wished unsaid.

Miss Rowland, however, had heard enough. "Delightful! she exclaimed. "Then I may venture to make a proposal I should not have dared to do otherwise. Will you sometimes join me when I drive about? I cannot tell you how glad I should be of a companion. I am all alone in the daytime, you know. Ernest only comes home at half-past five, and I have a great, big carriage here, in which I sit up all alone day after day. Do let me call for you to go with me sometimes. I will take you anywhere you like. I never have much to do, and it would be so much pleasanter going together, if you would."

An assent being readily given, "I usually end with Mudie's," proceeded the speaker; "we change our books every other day, sometimes oftener, and I like to change them myself. And, I like looking in there and seeing what is going on; do you belong to Mudie's?"

Now Monica knew that Mudie's subscription, in common with many other good things, was beyond her present reach, and a few months ago she would have rejoined with some easy excuse, the thought of the moment, to conceal this and evade curiosity; it was a sign of the struggle towards a purer ideal which had been born within her soul that she now in reply gave utterance to a simple negative. Of course Miss Rowland divined what lay behind this negative. That she did not at once offer to lend books, that she did not proffer all kinds of services and attentions was due to delicacy of feeling alone. Wealthy and generous, her impulse would have been to lavish at once upon the two whom she had known in such different circumstances every kind of thoughtful benefaction—but she knew better. All that she could do must be done later; done when continued intercourse and intimacy, and perhaps affection, warranted as much; and accordingly

her quiet dismissal of the subject and gradual transition to another was all that could be desired.

"We are really staying an unmerciful time." exclaimed Monica suddenly, and she looked round for her sister. Bell, with a bright tint on either cheek, was leaning over her muff, merry as Monica had of late but seldom seen her. On the edge of a lounge near, bending forward as occasion required, and equally merry and well occupied, was Mr. Ernest Rowland. The book of colored caricatures wherewith he was regaling his visitor apparently entertained them both.

One minute, Monica, just one minute," cried the latter, in obedience to the sisterly summons. "Mr. Rowland is showing me such a funny book. It is really too funny; it is quite delicious; you ought to see it; do show it to her," to the showman. "Oh, did you say we really must go? Well, I must leave the rest," regretfully closing the tempting volume.

"—To another time. I shall put a marker in, and call it Miss Lavenham's marker," and the book was lifted from her lap.

As the speaker lifted it another pair of eyes were directed towards him. It flashed through Monica's mind on the instant that she had been told young Mr. Rowland was considered the handsomest man in Liverpool. He was tall, broad-shouldered, and athletically formed. Every feature was correct, and the head was well carried on the shoulders. She could find no fault with him. Had she lived till Doomsday she would never have admired him. Why was this? She could not tell. But though her own opinion on the point might be immaterial, there was someone else whose verdict was of more consequence. What, for instance, did Bell think? What if Bell were to begin taking fancies into her head. That Mr. Rowland was making himself agreeable was all very well, as it should be, and in all respects desirable *pour passer le temps*. "But we have had enough of love-making and mischief-making for the present, at least," sighed poor Monica, with a little treacherous ache beneath her own bosom. "I must take care of my Bell. She must neither suffer, nor make others suffer as I have done."

"Isabel," she cried gayly, aloud, "I am afraid to think

of the names that poor man outside must be calling us already. We must not stay a minute longer. Do you know how long we have stayed already? I don't. I could not see the clock from where I sat, and I shall not look at it now." Protestations and laughter, and a hubbub of hearty "good-byes," and the two were off.

"She is to call for us at three o'clock to-morrow," said Monica, with animation. "We are to drive about, and do our shopping—not that we have much to do, but still there are some places I really want to go to,—and, besides, I thought it better to accept the first invitation, in case we might not get another. It will really make a difference to our whole life, Bell, if we have a nice girl like that to go about with, and a nice carriage to go about in."

"It will really," said Bell, in the same tone, "I was so glad you agreed to it. For a few moments I was afraid you were going to refuse."

"I never thought of refusing."

"I suppose you only demurred at the first so as not to seem too eager. Of course it would not do to seem too eager, but, still, Monica, with them I somehow should not mind. They were so very kind—both of them. I think the brother wanted to ask us to something; did you see how he slipped behind and whispered in her ear—but she just pressed her lips together and gave him a look. Then she caught my eye. But she did not do it in the least disagreeably, only as if—I fancy she thought it better taste not. Do you not think it was that?"

"I am sure of it; and she was quite right. But we will go if they ask us. I like that girl. She has sense —which we have not."

"Oh, Monica, you have!"

"I might have had, if it had been called into play—but sense had no chance in Lowndes Square. We all said the same things, and did the same things; and whether we either felt what we said, or liked what we did, it was all one. It was *chic* to do—this and that—and to be *chic* was enough. Bell, my dear, we are not *chic* now; I begin to have some hope for us."

"Do you—do you think Ernest Rowland handsome, Monica?"

"Very handsome, Bell."

"Uncle Schofield said he was considered the best-looking man in Liverpool."

"He would be a good-looking man anywhere."

"He has not the air of Harry Dorrien," said Bell, as though to herself. "Harry had an air—a way of holding his head up and dropping his eyelids down—even I used to feel sometimes that I—I liked to look at him, and he never took the slightest notice of me. I know you must have loved him, when for you he——"

"Hush!" said Monica softly. A cold moon was shining into her eyes, and she kept them turned full towards it; Bell's babble was sweeter to her ear than she would have cared for Bell to know, and there was no refuge but in silence when this was the case.

It had been agreed between the sisters that Dorrien was to be spoken of freely between them. "I will not have him turned into a sealed subject," Monica had said. "I did Mr Dorrien a great wrong, and he owes me, or ought to owe me, a bitter grudge. But he does not see it in that light, and we parted friends. I should like to hear you talk of him now and then, dear Bell. Your talking would be better than my thinking,' and she had smiled as she spoke, and endeavored thus to pass off the subject.

But, all the same, Bell was not to encroach. She might say that Dorrien had an air, and own to having liked to look at him,—but she was not to insist on prying into whether this feeling had been shared by anyone else. She was to be content with her own admiration.

"Still you think Mr. Ernest Rowland is handsome, do you, my dear Miss Penetration?" continued Monica, presently.

"Oh, yes, I do. Do you not? And he has very good manners, and a pleasant voice. I liked him very much to-day. And, Monica, what a delightful house it was—so comfortable; and that cosy nook by the fire, all sheltered in from the rest of the room, and those great, easy chairs, and that good tea. I don't think I ever enjoyed afternoon tea so much in my life," with renewed zest of appetite at the recollection.

"You certainly looked as if you never had."

"What do you mean, Monica?"

"Oh, nothing, Bell."

"But you do mean something. I hear it in your laughing voice; your voice always laughs when you are mischievous, and so do your eyes. Let me see your eyes. Yes, they are just as full of laughter as they can be. Monica, what is it? Oh, Monica, you don't mean—you can't mean——"

—"If I mean anything, it will come out soon enough," said Monica, springing lightly down as the hansom stopped. "I am not sure that I do mean anything; but if I did, I expect I should mean—Mr. Ernest Rowland." She had been led into saying the very thing she did not mean to say.

Bell walked into the house deeply affronted.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE HEART-WHOLE WOMAN.

Who hath talked of weeping? Yet
There is something at my heart
Gnawing, I would fain forget;
And an aching, and a smart.—C. G. ROSSETTI.

"I AM sure he never thought of *that*," she cried, as soon as wrath and confusion would let her speak. "And I am sure I did not, and never should. It is too bad of you, Monica, to put such an idea into one's head. I was only thinking of him as a—as a host, as some one to be talked to, who was busy looking after us, and very kind, and pleasant, and amusing—he really was very amusing; but if you think I asked you afterwards about his being considered good-looking, because—because—oh! I am very angry with you, Monica! I am indeed, Monica!"

"I am most dreadfully penitent, Bell."

"You are laughing at me again now."

"Laughing? Oh, no: not laughing. Not laughing *much*. Or if I am, what's in a laugh any more than in a rose? Seriously, my dear, this is no laughing matter. When I saw you and Mr. Rowland in such very close

conversation together, and so very well pleased with each other, I was not at all inclined to laugh. I said to my wise self, 'This will never do. My good sister is not to play the fool as I have played it,' and I meant to give a little piece of admonition on the subject. But anon I take note of your friend—I observe he pays me no attention—(you had your day in regard to that complaint, Bell; it is my day now)—and I think my own thoughts. When my dear sister asks so sweetly and seriously, with such a heavenly innocence in her accents, for my opinion of Mr. Beauty Rowland's looks, I think them still more. On the whole they are pleasant thoughts. I might go on with the series under very little encouragement."

But Isabel was not to be won. She had been so genuinely unconscious, so absolutely straightforward in her simplicity, that it did seem as if she should not have been the victim of mirth and slyness.

Bell was slower of temperament than her sister. Monica's blood galloped in her veins; Bell's stole along. When a new idea came to Monica, it burst in upon her, carrying all before it; the same would be admitted cautiously and reluctantly into Bell's mind.

Monica was now all alive to another aspect of life than any which had ever before been presented to her. Bell was not so sure about this aspect.

Her timid nature clung to old traditions. Her more sluggish imagination had never at any time busied itself with speculative theories and deductions; so that long after the quicker and more reflective elder had learned to despise and suspect, the younger was still being guided by Colonel Lavenham's maxims.

Thus in the revolution of ideas which had travelled swiftly over the spirit of the former, the latter had had but a very minor share. She had been borne along by Monica's side on the breast of the strong current which swept across her sister's soul. She had agreed to all Monica said, because it was Monica who spoke; but with it all, in secret she still held to a few dogged reservations with a tenacity which did credit to her fibre.

One of these reservations was in regard to old friends and new. Bell would be obstinately silent when

Monica railed against the world which had, if we may so speak, borne and bred them. It made her uneasy, even though she had no defence to offer; and as her former life had suited her easy nature better in all respects than it had accommodated itself to the higher spirit of her sister, it can hardly be wondered at that she should still look back upon it with longings and regrets. She was also a full year younger than Monica, though that perhaps did not greatly signify. The pair had made their *début* together, the Lavenhams having been impatient of the success which was expected to attend the production of the beautiful orphans, and reluctant to wait till Isabel was arrived at the accredited age.

It will thus be understood that, although at nineteen years old the younger Miss Lavenham was in some respects a woman of the world, with twenty-fold the experience of many a mature matron, she still beheld it fresh, sparkling, inviting; was still unwilling to believe that it could ever be anything else.

Partly from the tender consideration for a weaker creature incident to one possessed of infinite force of character, and partly from a desire to shut her own eyes and see only what she chose to see, Monica had kept to herself much of the knowledge which her strange life brought, and it was only during the past few weeks that Isabel had come to perceive how differently the two must always have felt. Monica had at once loved and hated, clung to and repulsed, feared and scorned the world she lived in. While firmly implanted, as she believed, in its midst, she had scoffed at it and made light of it; subsequently, in the uprooting and demolition which had followed, it had obtained in her eyes a fictitious value and endearment; finally, she was by one rapid transition and another, fast throwing it off altogether.

This will serve to explain to my readers Monica Lavenham's attitude towards the young man whom she thought, and not unwarrantably, had been attracted by her sister. "Why not?" she inquired of herself. "He is a gentleman; not a fine gentleman, not a smart man,—but a gentleman all the same. She would never be ashamed of him,—he would never give her any oc-

casion to be ashamed of him. Then he is rich, and could offer a comfortable home. Lastly, he has a devoted sister, who on the slightest encouragement is ready to break out in songs of praise loud enough to fill the dome of St. Paul's. He must be a good fellow, I should say—a good, steady, work-a-day husband, who would suit Bell down to the ground. No trouble—no temper—no anything. As for his beauty—oh! dear me, yes,—anything she likes to call it. He has an immaculate nose, irreproachable eyes and mouth, and a superb head of hair. N.B.—He ought to have it cut. I will cry ditto to every other commendation, but if she says his hair is not too long, I shall make a stand. It is very pretty hair, pretty and well brushed,—but he must go to the hairdresser if he is to become my brother-in-law. The shorter a man's hair is kept," continued this excellent authority, with decision, "the better; especially when it waves;" and on a sudden her eyes took a far-away look, her lips fell apart, and she woke up presently with a sigh, to wish she had not been thinking again of Harry Dorrien.

Bell, however, hardly got on so fast. The Rowlands were still to her only the Rowlands. The house in Queen's Gate only the *pis aller* to which their weary steps and sinking hearts had turned, when Belgrave Square and Eaton Square had drove them unrelentingly away. And though she had enjoyed herself within the fire-lit oasis, and found an amusing companion in her host, she was astonished to find that Monica should, to use a homely phrase, "even" her to the level which Monica's words indicated. Practical Monica was somewhat taken aback by this view of the subject. She had, as we have seen, whirled round with the velocity of lightning from her first standpoint and from cogitating that there had been enough and too much love-making in the family for the present, had with characteristic inconsistency come in a couple of hours' time to see that nothing could be more desirable.

"It is sheer nonsense, however"—she pursued the above ruminations impetuously. "I must set myself to work off all such littleness. It is not pride,—I could understand pride,—but Bell never was proud,—she has no right to begin being proud,—and besides, she is *not*

proud, emphatically and illogically. "She is just a goose," continued the elder sister, with a sister's impartial frankness. "And if there is anything in it, I must not allow her to be a goose. I am sure I only wish there were something in it. I only hope there may be. Queen's Gate?—why not Queen's Gate? Bell might be as happy in Queen's Gate as anywhere else. I am sure aunt Fanny used to visit there, though it happened that we forgot if she did. She must have visited there—of course she visited there. And what in the name of common sense does it matter whether she did or not? It is perfectly ridiculous—it is idiotic to think so much about such things. I always felt it was so; though I talked like the rest, and was as silly as anybody. Six months ago I should have said, 'Where is Queen's Gate?' with quite as good an air as Bell did the other day, though I should have known perfectly, even to a square inch, the head and the tail of it. It is a very nice part too—nice and open—and the houses are magnificent; if, supposing Ernest Rowland follows up *les petits soins* of this afternoon, it is as well to be prepared. It does not do to drift. I have seen the evil of drifting. So!"—meditatively—"so! if Bell can think Ernest Rowland a handsome man, she may very well think his home a handsome house. And if she does not think it"—a pause—"she has just *got* to think it," concluded Miss Lavenham, with the authority of a commander-in-chief disposing of a drummer boy.

Accordingly, "I did not know Mr. Rowland belonged to the 'Junior Carlton,'" observed she one day, when the two came in to find a certain card on their table. "The 'Junior Carlton,'" proceeded Monica, taking it up, and eying the superscription.

"I don't see that *that* is anything," rejoined her sister, who was still somewhat tart upon the subject. "Anyone may belong to a club, I suppose."

"Then you suppose very wrongly, my dear. To belong to a good club—to so good a club as the 'Junior Carlton'—argues a certain status; that is to say, it is always thought something of, especially among men. The 'Junior Carlton'——" she paused.

"I suppose Mr. Dorrien belongs to it," quoth Bell, a little maliciously.

"Yes, he does,"—Monica affected to perceive nothing—"he does, and what I was wondering was, can it have been he who put Mr. Rowland up for it? I know they are friends."

"Oh! Monica, *friends!*"

"I tell you they *are* friends," with some asperity. "I knew that long ago. Everyone likes the Rowlands, and Lady Dorrien herself told me that she did not know how it was she had never called upon them. I remember her very words were, 'Harry is such friends with the eldest son.'"

"So that is why you have taken him up so warmly?"

"Absurd!" But Monica colored. "As if Mr. Rowland needed to be 'taken up' by me or by anyone," she continued briskly. "If you don't like him, *don't* like him, and see no more of him,—but for goodness' sake let us have the truth about it. Nobody wants to force your inclinations, as it is called; but if you begin to pretend that he is not good enough for you, and all that kind of silly, foolish, school-girlish rubbish," tone and emphasis rising with every word, "you will make a perfect laughing-stock of yourself, and you will meet with no sympathy from *me*."

"I never said he was not good enough—I never said such a word, Monica."

"You meant it, and you looked it. You turned down the corners of your prim mouth at his card,—"

—"Only because you made such a fuss about it."

"I made no fuss about it. I said that I did not know that Mr. Rowland belonged to the 'Junior Carlton,' and neither I did. You were on the look-out for a chance of being disagreeable, and so you snapped at me. You would not have said what you did about—other people, if you had not meant to be disagreeable."

"What other people?"

But Monica marched out of the room.

She was not so angry, however, but that she smiled to herself as soon as she was on the stairs. "She is left standing with his card in her hand," she nodded. "Oh, my dear Bell, I don't fancy you will ask, 'Where is Queen's Gate?' another time."

On the next occasion when Mr. Rowland called, the young ladies were at home.

It was a raw, foggy, miserable day, and the lamps were flaring in the little street outside. Within, the house was only half-lit—not sufficiently illuminated to be cheerful, but reluctantly and as it were grudgingly accorded a glimmer, which was barely sufficient to unravel the gloom. A solitary gas jet was burning, where three or four others were turned off.

In the Miss Lavenhams' parlor each sister had a novel in her hand, her feet on the fender, and a candle at her elbow, by whose light she was reading. The two chairs were pulled round in front of a rather disorderly grate, in which the fire had burned low, and where ashes largely predominated.

In truth, the whole small, shabby apartment was at the worst; and as its occupants sprang to their feet on the entrance of a new-comer, each was cruelly conscious of its being so. They had not expected anyone; and though of course aware that, in London especially, one should always believe in the unexpected, so few and far between had been their visitors hitherto, that they had allowed a dismal afternoon to drift away, and had settled themselves down to read some of the new books lent by Gertrude Rowland, without paying heed to the cheerless aspect of their abode.

"Even our miserable little messy tea was on the table," said Bell, afterwards, "with its horrid little tray, and cups of common china. I *was* so ashamed—weren't you, Monica? And he had never been to see us before—I mean, he had never been let in before. It was so dreadfully unfortunate that he should have come on such a day!"

"Oh, well we put it to rights before he left, I think," replied her sister, hopefully. "And he knows we are only in lodgings, so cannot be expected to have things comfortable."

"But we do sometimes have them comfortable—that was the worst of it. We can at least make the room look tidy and bright. The day Lady Annette called, we were looking as nice as possible. It was that which made it so tiresome," and there was a suspicion of tears in her mortified tone.

Monica could not help laughing. "You would have

preferred to have had Lady Annette come on the unlucky day, and Mr. Rowland on the lucky day?"

"Pshaw!" said Isabel, turning away.

"Now, my dear Bell, don't 'Pshaw!' at me—'tis of no use, and only breeds ill-will. We have had our little quarrel on the subject, and now we are good friends again, and are going to discuss the situation amicably. I was as much annoyed as you were to-day. I was red to the very roots of my hair when that dreadful girl with her dreadful accent bawled out 'Mr. Riaowland!' and flung him into the room without giving us a moment's warning. But when I saw how very little of it all he seemed to see, and how absolutely none of it all he seemed to feel, I own I forgot to be vexed, and thought only of—other things."

"Of what did you think, Monica?" said Bell in rather a low voice.

"Of you, dear, for one. This is the second time within a few days that this visitor has been here. Meantime we have been there. When either there or here it is the same thing. Shall I put that thing into words?" smiling.

"No, no, don't, Monica," but Bell was also smiling. "But, Monica," she proceeded after a momentary pause, "if—of course I am only saying 'if'—but if it were as you think—do you—I don't quite understand how you are so anxious that—that I——" she faltered and paused.

"My dear sister, do not try to understand. I don't myself understand. I doubt if the matter is understandable, if it comes to that. All I know is this, that if a good fellow with a good fortune comes to you and wishes to marry you, and you think you can like this good fellow—let me see—it will be—it will be *your* good fortune if you secure him. See that?" and without giving her sister an opportunity of replying, she ran away.

She wanted Bell to have time to think. Also she wanted her to be eager for another discussion; and we may add for the benefit of match-making sisters, that in each of these aims the astute Miss Lavenham was wise to admiration. Before the next meeting Mr. Rowland had, thanks to her discretion, secured his outposts.

"Well, did you find them in? I suppose so, since you are so late?" observed Gertrude on his return to

Queen's Gate, on the evening in question. She was still in cloak and bonnet, and had herself only just returned from her afternoon drive.

"You mean the Lavenhams? How did you know I was going there?" replied he, answering one question by another.

"Oh, I know;" said Gertrude, smiling. "I guessed. That was why I did not go. Otherwise I should have looked in upon them, for I passed their very door, driving to the Chadwicks;" but I put a restraint upon my feelings, and scarcely allowed myself even to look up at their windows."

"Oh, oh! You expect me to believe that? Well, if you were so near, you might have given me a lift home. I had to find my way through the fog, and that was not easy coming across the Park. The fog"—

—"Now, my dear Ernest, have pity on me, and let the fog alone. Tell me what I really want to know. You saw the girls, and——?" She looked the rest.

"And they will be delighted to dine and go to the theatre on any night we fix."

"That's right. Now what night shall it be? This is Monday. Shall we say Thursday or Friday?"

"Why not to-morrow?"

"Too soon, I should think."

"Too soon? Not at all, at Mitchell's; Mitchell has stalls up to the very last. We did not fix on a play, but I was to consult you. They seem ready for anything."

"I am so glad, Ernest."

"Are you, Gertrude?"

He drew a little nearer.

"There is something about those two," said she, putting her hand within his arm, "that fascinates me just as it does you. I don't know what it is, but I like to look at them; to watch them; to admire their pretty ways and pretty movements. They look so perfect altogether. I have seen such girls before, seen them sitting up in carriages in the Park, and at picture galleries and concerts—at all sorts of public places in London—but I do not mind owning that I have never, no never, come into contact with any of their kind before. Down at Oldfield—(Oldfield was the Rowlands' Lancashire home),—where we had our first peep at them; you

remember how it was? They were riding with poor Mr. Schofield round by the honeysuckle lane one warm evening. I thought at once I had never seen two more lovely girls. And it was not only their beauty; they sat so gracefully, and talked so charmingly; but oh, my dear Ernest, it is hardly fair in me to run on like this; if I, a woman, have an actual fit of hero worship for Monica and Isabel Lavenham, what must you, a man feel?"

"You are an enthusiast, Gertrude," but he looked affectionately.

"And yet they say that women never can appreciate each other," pursued she. "Now, when I am with Monica Lavenham——"

"—Oh, it is Monica, is it?" A faint inflection of disappointment in his tone.

"It is Monica with me, but," said Miss Rowland smiling, "it is just as well it is not Monica with you, my dear brother. I imagine you would have been forestalled in that quarter had it been."

"You mean," he said, "by Dorrien?"

"To be sure; yes; by Mr. Dorrien. Everybody knows it. But as soon as it came out that she had inherited nothing from her uncle, he cried off—at least," apologetically, "that is what everybody said."

Her brother looked thoughtfully into the fire. "It was true," he muttered; then paused, and added slowly, "and yet as false as hell."

"Oh, Ernest, what a word to use!" Miss Rowland was not accustomed to such words.

"Look here, Gertrude," said he, turning round to face her. "I'll tell you why I say so. It's because I *know*—I know the whole truth about that story; and I can only say that if ever I was sorry for any man in my life, I was for poor Harry Dorrien."

"Why, Ernest, I never heard you even speak of it."

"I never wished to speak of it. It was the sort of thing a fellow does not speak about. When I heard that smooth-tongued sneaking Lionel Carnforth going about whispering and sniggering, I could have kicked him. He always made himself out to be such a friend of Dorrien's. But give Lionel a chance of a hit in the

back, no matter whose back, and he is never the one to miss taking it."

"But what did you know?"

"I don't suppose it matters my telling you now," said he, after thinking a moment. "I travelled up to town with Harry Dorrien the night he left for Australia. He was simply a broken-hearted man. Mind you, he felt the shame of the thing as well as all the rest. It was perfectly maddening to him not only to have to give up Miss Lavenham, but to have to do so in such a way. For such a shabby reason. He told me that if he could have done anything—scraped enough together by any sort of means—he would have been at her feet the very instant he knew she was penniless. I mean penniless as regarded Joseph Schofield's money. But he simply has not a farthing of his own, and neither has his father any to give him. It appears that Sir Arthur is about at the end of his tether. And so the race will die out, unless——" he stopped.

"Unless what?"

"I am sure I don't know what to say. I am afraid it is all up with poor Dorrien; but it gives me a certain interest in Miss Lavenham."

"Oh, Ernest—oh, fie! Oh, Ernest, you hypocrite!"

"I did not say that it gave me an interest in Miss Isabel Lavenham, Gertrude."

"Oh? Oh, I understand." She beamed significance.

"If I succeed in my own hopes," replied her brother, gazing steadfastly into the glowing embers, "I would do anything—anything to help Dorrien. My only fear is,"—but he did not explain what that fear was. In his secret heart he had a foreboding of evil.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A CHRISTMAS EVE.

Sorrows remembered sweeten present joy.—POLLOK.

NOVEMBER passed, and with December days came December weather.

The winter of 1870, it will be remembered, was one of peculiar severity, and frosty days and bitter nights set in shortly before Christmas. On Christmas Eve lakes, rivers, ponds all over the country were bearing; and those who were lucky enough to skate and light-hearted enough to think of nothing but skating, were in the seventh heaven of delight at the prospect before them.

"But how dismal it would have been in London!" cried Isabel Lavenham, as with radiant eyes she looked out from the windows of a railway carriage, upon snowy landscapes skimming past under rose-tinted skies. "Oh, Monica, to think what we should have felt if we had been all alone huttering over the fire in that wretched little Albion Street, on this Christmas Eve!"

The sisters were flying north as fast as an express train could bear them. They were equipped in handsome travelling dresses, and had fur wraps, bags, and other paraphernalia in the carriage; obviously they were going out of town for Christmas; as obviously were they going with glad hearts. One was simply brimming over with excitement and joyous anticipation; she could not keep her countenance in order; smiles broke out at every moment without any apparent provocation.

The face of the other, though less transformed and irradiated, wore an air of serenity which indeed at times shaded into pensiveness, as she also watched the frost-bound country scenes succeed each other, and with her muff cleared the trickling panes that, as the carriage grew warmer inside, sometimes threatened to obscure her view.

"I can hardly believe it," continued Bell, after another bright silence, during which it was plain that happy visions danced before her eyes. "I really can hardly believe it. To be on our way back already! And oh, Monica, to be so glad to go! I never thought to see the dear old place again; it seems years and years since we left it! And that dreadful day we left, we thought we should never return! Even then I felt sorry, more sorry than I liked to allow; but still I did love London, and he thought of going back to London kept me up. But

now, Monica, do you not shudder when you look back on these last six weeks? London, when you are 'out of it,' when you are poor, and cannot go to things, and have nobody come near you, and are afraid even to take a hansom for fear of what it will cost—oh, London is a dreadful place in November and in lodgings!"

"You had better not rail too much against London, my dear, I expect you will pass a considerable portion of your future life there."

"So I shall, so I hope I shall. Just think how delightful it will be! Ernest says his father means to give us that house in Queen's Gate for our very own—it is to be his wedding present; only if we like to change houses with him every now and then we can do so; but in the future Ernest is to have entire control of the London house, and Mr. Rowland will stick to the Liverpool house."

"Hear the child!" cried Monica merrily. "The 'London house' and the 'Liverpool house' indeed! She will know how to take control of both houses in her own person some of these days, And pray, my dear young merchant-princess, what is to become of me when all these fine arrangements are made? Am I to go on 'huttering over the fire' in Albion Street?"

"Why, you *know*, Monica—what in the world do you mean? As if—and you know the very instant it was settled, how Ernest——,"

"—Oh yes, 'Ernest'!" Monica made a mocking face. "Ernest is all that is honey-sweet to me, of course. And well he may be; he owes me a good turn. Well, well, my dear, we shan't squabble. I daresay there will be an inch of carpet for me in your gorgeous mansion, and perhaps now and then you will permit me to sit with my back to the horses in your grand carriage."

"You silly!" But even Bell could see her sister was jesting. "Don't you wonder what uncle Lavenham and aunt Fanny will say?" she cried next. "They ought to have heard by this time. Let me see. We wrote the night before last. I suppose we ought to have written sooner, but you wished to wait till everyone had heard from everyone, and all that. Now I shall be curious to see how they will take it."

"Set your curiosity at rest," observed Monica, dryly. "If you care to listen to me I can give you a perfect facsimile of the scene. Time, 10 A. M. Breakfast on a little round table, in the midst of many more little round tables, in the morning room of the best hotel of Monte Carlo. Enter Colonel and Mrs. Lavenham: not quite so much of invalids as they would have the world generally and their dear nieces in particular, believe; in fact, quite able to enjoy having their breakfast in the public room, and in the midst of all the counts and barons. Then they open their letters—those from poor dear Monica and Isabel last, because the poor dear girls never have anything to say, can have nothing to say—and because doleful accounts of London fogs and London lodgings are not appetizing for the morning meal. At length, however, they do open 'poor dear Bell's' letter. They open yours first, my dear Bell, because they are not afraid of you; they know you are a grumbler——,"

"—Monica, you should not call me a grumbler. Pray do not call me a grumbler before Ernest; he would not like it; and I am sure if ever I did grumble a little at one time, I am not going to do so any more."

"You will have wondrous little to grumble at; but, however—(Mrs. Schofield again, Bell; it is the 'coming event' of her presence which 'casts its shadow before.' By the way, I shall go over to see Mrs. Schofield at once, to-morrow; I am actually looking forward to going,)—but, however, I have no doubt you will do a little, little jeremiad now and again, just to keep your hand in. I shall expect something of this sort presently: 'Ernest, my French maid *is* so stupid!' or, 'My second footman *is* so ugly!'"

"Oh, Monica, Monica!"

"And now you have thrown me off my Lavenham tableau. I had just come to the place where your letter has priority of attention. What a shock—what an agony of delight it will cause them! Aunt Fanny will turn up her eyes to thank Providence—(they left us to Providence, you see, so naturally they know whom to thank),—and uncle Lavenham will take all the honor and glory to himself. How he will strut and swagger! He will sit down at his desk and pen us such an effu-

sion. The worst of it is, I am afraid there really will be some justice in his crow, for undoubtedly if we had not taken kindly to our Schofield connections, and they to us, we should never have known the Rowlands. We shall have to put up with uncle Lavenham's congratulations, Bell."

"You think he and aunt Fanny will be pleased?"

"Pleased?" Monica laughed with all her old scorn. "Pleased, my dear Bell, is a faint, mild, poor, wishy-washy word for the sensation they will experience. They will be transported, enchanted, absolutely convulsed with ecstasy. Not only will they perceive you settled in state—for the Rowlands must be even richer than I thought they were—but they will see me—in their mind's eye—treading in your steps. They will say——," and she broke off and laughed a little.

"What will they say? Why do you laugh?"

"I was going to be very conceited; and, now I think of it, I shall be conceited still. You are bound to be number one all day long at the place we are going to; all the affection and attention, and fuss and fume will be about you and over you; so it will be a nice little antidote for you beforehand to hear what uncle Lavenham's ruminations will be on the subject."

"Well, go on," Neither her uncle's nor anyone else's ruminations could do away with the grand fact which had wrought as by magic such a change in Isabel Lavenham's life, and her complacency being so great, Monica proceeded merrily:—

"He will say: 'By Jove, my dear, since Bell has done so well, why should not Monica do still better? Monica is the handsomer of the two; she has style, air, carriage'—(he always used to tell me I had 'style, air, carriage,' when I was to be spurred on to look out for a coronet)—'why should she not double Bell's good luck? She will now have a decent house to be seen at and to be taken about from,—'"

—"But will they think that of a house in Queen's Gate?"

"Pooh, pooh! my dear Bell, you don't yet understand things. When we are very fine and fashionable, and fearfully alive to every speck on our Belgravian garments, we cannot afford to let their lustre be dimmed

by so much as the shade of Queen's Gate falling across them. That is, when we have no *reason* for being civil to Queen's Gate, do you see; no *object* for recognizing its claims. When uncle Lavenham and aunt Fanny first took us up, they and we were on our promotion; we regularly cringed into ourselves for fear of contamination on every side. We scarcely dared to know anybody who was not vouched for by some recognized authority in our own set. We shook with trepidation lest anything we did should receive a stare or a comment. I believe aunt Fanny was in utter thraldom to that sister-in-law of hers, that Lady Sophia whom we used to hate; and I am sure uncle Lavenham had one or two men at his club before whose opinion he shook in his shoes. So, in those days, the mention of Queen's Gate—or of any other Gate in that neighborhood—would have blistered their lips. But, my dear, a marriage, a solid, substantial, useful alliance alters all that. I remember reading somewhere of a girl who exclaimed in wonder that a friend should marry a man she had once declared she would not dance with. The answer was that one would marry many a man one would not dance with. Do you perceive the moral of the tale?"

"No, I don't," said Bell, bluntly. "I would dance with Ernest with pleasure. I am sure he dances beautifully."

"You tiresome creature! My rhetoric is wasted on you. *That*, my dear Bell, was not the point at all. The point was, that whereas uncle Lavenham might, and probably would, have been a little shy about walking with this Ernest of yours along St. James's had he only known him as Mr. Ernest Rowland, a rich young merchant, with no smart relations nor dashing predilections; as *your husband*, as the man who has taken his troublesome niece off his hands and made upon her a rampant settlement, he will be his very humble servant. He will dine with you, my dear Bell, with all the pleasure in life. He will ask you to drive him in the Park. He will do still more: he will perform what he considers the whole duty of man towards his new nephew, in that he will invite him to lunch at his club."

In saying all of which Monica had an object. She desired that her sister should clearly understand both

what she would gain and what she would lose by her marriage with Ernest Rowland. The gain would infinitely outbalance the loss,—but still it was as well that Bell, in the first flush of her new-found bliss, should recollect that she was wedding, with the full consent and approbation of her own people, one whom hitherto she and they would have considered outside the pale.

This need not afflict her, and it would prevent any shock of after discoveries. If former acquaintances should on their return to London be less ardent and intimate than they had been, Bell would be prepared. It would only need that Monica should remind her of this conversation, and other similar ones, and she would soon become acclimatized to the new state of things.

Moreover Isabel had by this time had her own pinch of experience. Six weeks either may or may not be a long period of time. If it be passed amidst congenial surroundings, in health and happiness, it flies like the wind; but if struggled through under a load of daily privations, disappointments, and anxiety, it seems as though it never would end.

Each morning of late had seen our fair sisters rise to encounter cheerless meals, aimless peregrinations, and interminable intervals. They knew not how to get through their days. The expeditions which Monica projected one after another fell through. The distances were so great, the days so short and dark, their means of getting about so limited, that they had at last cared only to walk disconsolately round and round in the Park, or Gardens, returning to their own dull room as soon as a sense of duty would permit. "We must go out, I suppose," had been their reluctant conclusion on each dreary day; but if they had consulted their inclinations they would almost have preferred staying at home.

Nor had the friendship of the Rowlands done much towards mitigating the monotony of the routine for some little time. With admirable tact and patience the brother and sister had felt their way inch by inch, never intruding, never thrusting themselves forward, and above all never offering attentions which it was impossible to refuse. "They may be very glad to see us, and not sorry to go about with us, just at this time of

year when no one they know is in London," Gertrude observed; "but, Ernest, do not let us run on too fast. If—if there should be any mistake," she had whispered tenderly, hardly liking to look at him as she made the suggestion. He had heard her in silence, but let several days elapse before venturing upon his next appearance in Albion Street.

It had then been Monica's turn to whisper. "If—if there should be any mistake?" and Bell's to look a little pale at the suggestion.

All had, however, gone right in the end; within a week of Christmas Day the *dénouement* had taken place, and now, as we know, Miss Isabel Lavenham, with her overflowing spirits painted upon either cheek, was hurrying down to the country home of her betrothed, to meet him there, and be presented as his future bride to a large family party gathered for the occasion.

It was barely dusk when the travellers arrived, and the commodious mansion was gleaming with firelight, while the last rays of the wintry sun hovered over it, and brightened roof and turret, gable and archway. Ernest was in the shrubbery, and dashed on to the step of the wagonette as they neared the door; within the doorway they had a glimpse of the commanding presence of his father, as the horses whirled round to enter the portico with a flourish; and Mrs. Rowland's stately form emerged from the nearest apartment as the sisters entered. There was no time for shyness or nervousness.

Bell must of course be first with all, but the undisguised warmth with which Monica was also welcomed made her anew congratulate herself that in this house at least she had nothing whereof to repent. She had always been polite to the Rowlands: they were not to know that but for circumstances she might never have been anything more; and now, now she felt that she could meet all advances and respond to everyone's cordiality with an alacrity unfettered by any twinges of conscience.

An agreeable party was gathered in the house, and her last vestige of apprehension was swept away. She found herself among people with whom she and her

sister could contentedly associate, and of whom they need never be ashamed.

One trifling incident alone occurred to trouble her mind throughout the perfect harmony of the evening.

"The Carnforths' dance is to be on Friday," said a girlish voice. "Ernest, we told you and Gertrude about it, did we not? They are going to have the house full; and what a party *we* shall be! We shall need three or four carriages. Some of you men must go in the dog-carts."

"Not if it freezes like this, thank you, Florrie. We shall seek shelter beneath some neighbor's rooftree if you refuse to take us inside with you. Is it to be a big dance? Is everyone going?"

"Oh, dear me, yes, it is to be quite a ball! Lionel Carnforth has been hunting up men for it all over the place."

"We shall be a pretty equal number," said another, looking round. "Six girls and six men, and mamma. If papa would only go——"

Papa, however, declined. It was not good enough, according to him. He did not mind a country ball, and he would now and again go to a Wellington Rooms ball; but a ball at the Carnforths'! He shook his head.

Monica shook hers imperceptibly also.

She also considered the occasion not good enough. What? Go to that house where—where—she felt the warm color stealing over her face and neck, as she finished the sentence to herself. She knew that it was at the Carnforths that Dorrien had betrayed himself to the world: she knew that he and she had there been the mark for every eye, and that their behavior during the evening had subsequently been the theme for every tongue. She knew it, and blushed to think of it.

So conscious was she of her own thoughts that she almost wondered how anyone could name the Carnforths' name to her, or in her presence; it seemed a positive indelicacy to count upon her going to the ball.

When Friday night came, Miss Lavenham was indisposed.

"But you may tell Ernest how it is," said she,

quietly, when alone with her sister. "Ernest must have heard about Mr. Dorrien and me. And I should like him to know I am not altogether a heartless flirt, even at the expense of his considering me a forlorn damsel," with a faint smile.

"You mean that you would like him to know that you do care." Bell pressed closer to her sister.

"That I *did* care—once."

"You do now, Monica." But Monica turned slowly away.

"Why, of course, she cares, and I honor her for it," asserted Ernest, when the confidence was made. "If Monica had not cared for Dorrien, after breaking the poor fellow's heart——," his lips closed abruptly.

"Ernest, what do you know about Mr. Dorrien's heart?" Isabel's gray eyes opened. "It was very sad," she added, pathetically, "but it could not be helped. Monica is going to forget him, and says he will forget her. They really must forget each other, you know; they can do nothing else."

"No, I suppose they can do nothing else. But yet," subjoined he, half aside, "I am glad she should not go to the Carnforths'."

The Carnforths, however, were not so glad. They had baited their hooks in all directions with the beautiful Miss Lavenhams. They had caused it to be supposed that it was their ball which had brought the illustrious visitors once more to the neighborhood. Mrs. Carnforth had openly regretted the impossibility of housing the sisters, since her house would be already full. Lionel had vaunted their charms to every dancing man whom he wished to secure.

"Dancing men" had now taken the place of "shooting men" in the family *repertoire*. "Dancing men" were to be stowed away in every nook and corner of Bingley Hall on the 28th. Traps for "dancing men" went down to meet every train. The luggage of "dancing men" was going wrong in all directions.

"So that we really could not put up the Miss Lavenhams, much as I should have liked to do so," lamented Mrs. Cranforth in a conclave before one of her large wood fires. "But they will be very comfortable at the Rowlands'. They are at the Rowlands'," you

know. Nice, kindly people, who have always room for everybody, and are coming over in a large party."

"Ernest Rowland has come down from London for our ball," added her son. "It is said he is another of Miss Lavenham's admirers."

"George Schofield was hard hit too," observed Captain Alverstoke, who was the latest arrival and the only stranger present. "Lionel, you and I were not in the swim. How was that?"

"Dorrien said so plainly 'Hands off!' Alverstoke, that we had no chance."

"By the way, where is Mr. Dorrien?" inquired Mrs. Carnforth. "We shall miss him to-night. He always came to our little dances. We used to reckon upon him as one of our dancing men, did we not, Grace? Does anyone know where Mr. Dorrien is? Of course I know he is at the Antipodes, but does anyone know where—I mean to what part he went?"

"I don't know, but I should like very much to know," said Alverstoke, dryly. He had partly come to the Carnforths, in order to find this out.

The only people whom he asked, however, could give him no information. Isabel Lavenham had neither seen nor heard anything of Mr. Dorrien since he left England. George Schofield had neither seen nor heard anything since he left Cullingdon; and it did not occur to the inquirer to ask Ernest Rowland.

When he heard, however, that the elder Miss Lavenham was suffering from headache, from which cause she had had to remain at home, he fancied he knew what to think.

Then he had the surprise, as nearly all present had the surprise, of hearing about the new engagement. It had not been announced before; but it was now buzzed all over the room, and many and various were the emotions it excited.

"Is it really true, Gertrude?" Mrs. Carnforth, in the very midst of her duties as hostess, caught a whisper of the news. "Is it really true?" she demanded, with a quick accent.

Ernest Rowland had for years been her mark, if not for Gracie, at least for one of the younger girls, and she had only recently resolved to push the siege and see if

Ethel's charms could not effect what her sister's had failed to achieve.

"Quite true, Mrs. Carnforth," replied Miss Rowland, demurely. She also had her *arrière pensée* on the matter as regarded Bingley Hall.

"It must have been very quickly made up, surely;" the elder lady twirled her fan. "I really fancied you knew the Miss Lavenhams so slightly that I don't believe we ever asked you to meet them. No, I am sure we never did."

"No, you never did." Gertrude was still demure, and still amused by her own thoughts.

"Of course they were not *much* here," continued Mrs. Carnforth; "poor Mr. Schofield dying so soon after we returned from my uncle's moor, and we having gone to Scotland rather earlier than usual last year, we did not see so much of them as we should have done, and they were not *often* here—but still," discomfiture and chagrin manifesting themselves upon her countenance, "still I—we—really I hardly knew you were acquainted at all."

Gertrude smiled.

"So I suppose I must congratulate Ernest," continued Mrs. Carnforth, tartly. "I am sure I hope he will be happy. He has certainly done well in choosing the one he has. Isabel may not be so good-looking as Monica, but she is better behaved. The other is a dreadful flirt;" her ill-humor increasing as she watched the happy pair circling round to the strains of the waltz, the countenance of the one illumined by an air of sweet satisfaction and content, that of the other glowing with proud and fond devotion.

She was jealous of both and angry with both. There were two sides to the question, and each side was equally ill to look at. Isabel Lavenham had stolen a march not only upon her girls, but upon all the girls in the neighborhood, in that she had carried off the richest young bachelor in that part of the world; but Ernest Rowland, on his part, had had no business to go in for birth and fashion. What had he and his to do with fashion? The Rowlands had always made out that fashion was out of their line altogether; nay, the Carnforths had been conscious of having been looked upon

by them with contempt upon this very score. Yet here were these steady-going, jog-trot old neighbors, who never moved an inch ahead of the times, and could scarcely be induced even to follow with a lagging step —who could hardly be despised, and yet according to the Carnforths' view ought to be despised, for their want of enterprise, lack of spirit, and dash, and splash—here were they about to cut out the very Carnforths themselves on their own ground!

Gentle as Isabel Lavenham looked, there would be no chance of teaching Mrs. Ernest Rowland the last new thing.

Now all that could be done was to shrug a peevish shoulder, and make little spiteful speeches.

How provoking it was! Here were Lionel's "dancing men" all looking about for Lionel's promised beauties, and here was Lionel's mother obliged to confess that Monica would not come, and that Isabel might also have stayed away for all the good they were likely to have of her. Bell's dances were distributed among the Rowland party, she had scarce one left for Lionel himself.

Greatly did one person present enjoy the discomfiture of his hostess. "Rough on the old lady this," quoth Captain Alverstoke, stroking his mustache to hide a grin. "She should have been more careful, though. After giving out right and left that the Lavenham girls are down for her ball, it now comes out that they are down on quite other business! All the swagger goes to the Rowlands. Must congratulate Rowland;" and he sauntered past a group of disappointed and irate young fellows, who were now turning up their noses, and gradually developing different complaints which stood in the way of their being introduced to partners of Lionel Carnforth's choosing.

They had been promised a very gay affair indeed; they did not think this promise had been fulfilled. The Carnforths, we must explain, had failed in other quarters as well as in that above recorded; and to tell the truth the ball, as a ball, was not brilliant.

"Positively not a creature worth looking at here," sniffed Master Algernon Vavasour, a very particular and choice young personage. "Positively I don't care to

know any one of the lot. That girl there," indicating Isabel Lavenham, "that's one of the Lavenhams, I know—I met her in Town once; jolly pretty girl she is, and so is her sister; but the sister has shirked, and this one, it seems, is only for the long fellow who is to marry her, they say. All right; I've no objection; it's quite fair and square—only what the deuce then do they mean by supposing she is any good to *us*? There's no one else. I have danced with the Carnforth girls till I can't stand any more of that lot. I've had enough of this ball. Alverstoke—I say, Alverstoke," in a new tone, at once joyous and natural. "Archie, let's be ill and go to bed. Picquet, eh? Toothache—headache—eh? I say, Archie, that will do the trick. My room is next yours; Ricketts will see to us, and we'll have a night of it. All right, eh?"

"All right;" Alverstoke imperceptibly nodded.

"Don't be long."

"I'll not be long."

"And I'll interview Ricketts. Hot or cold drink, or champagne—or—? Never mind, leave it to me. Ta-ta;" and the speaker slipped behind backs, and vanished on the instant.

This was how some of the "dancing men" acquitted themselves at the Carnforths'.

"But I must find out if anyone knows anything of Dorrien," quoth Alverstoke to himself, the following morning. "Three or four thou. is all very well, and I hardly expected to see it again; still—well, I suppose it will end in my going to Sir Arthur—though it is a hundred to one if I get the truth out of him, even supposing he knows it himself."

Sir Arthur did know, declared he knew—was indeed rather inclined to be testily communicative on the subject. Oh, he could tell Captain Alverstoke about Harry; could tell all about him; would look out the direction if Alverstoke would wait for it; did not suppose there would be any good in writing, at least not yet awhile; did not suppose Harry would be over eager for letters.

"Went out to a relation, did he not?" Captain Alverstoke shot a glance as he spoke.

"To that vagabondish nephew of mine. To that scamp, Luke Dorrien. What he pitched upon Luke for,

Heaven only knows! And Heaven only knows where the two are now! I have the direction—but, after all, what is the use of the direction?" suddenly staring into Alverstoke's face. "You know as well as I, Captain Alverstoke, that the direction a young fellow like Harry gives is often the very last likely to find him!"

"I assure you," said Alverstoke, replying to the stare, "that I have no desire to hurt Harry. I may say I am his *friend*," emphatically. "I knew he had gone out to your nephew, and I particularly wished to know if he had found him."

"You think he had better not find him?"

"On the contrary, I very much hope he may."

Sir Arthur looked astonished.

"I hope it from the bottom of my heart," said Alverstoke slowly. "So now, Sir Arthur, will you give me the direction?"

Sir Arthur looked a little foolish.

"But I—I really have not got it to give," he owned.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DAISY AND MONICA.

Rare is true love; true friendship is still rarer.

LET us take a few days' retrospect.

It was with a curious mingling of emotions that Monica Lavenham found herself once again traversing the lanes which had formerly been so familiar.

She had been gone just long enough to make such a return seem its strangest. Nothing had altered,—nothing had had time to alter,—yet in a manner she felt as if she had been years away! She had gone with all the sense of going forever. Her departure had been in her own mind absolutely final; and accordingly, if on the very next day after it had taken place she had been transplanted back again, there would have been a stirring up of associations and a recalling of bygone scenes such as would have been meet after long separation and exile.

The Grange, for instance, she had never beheld since the day on which she had had her interview with Daisy in the wood below. The after-events of that eventful day had been of such a nature as to make her thenceforth shrink not only from going thither, but even from wending her way in that direction. She had forced herself to say "Good-bye," to one and another who, living in the immediate vicinity of Flodden Hall, would have been wounded or affronted by an omission of civility inexcusable on the plea of deep mourning. Monica and Isabel had not been orphaned; neither had they lost a life-long friend in their elderly relation; wherefore, as Monica herself could not but own, to have left the neighborhood without any of the customary formalities of leave-taking would have shown the sisters wanting alike in good manners and good feeling. What concerned her more was that Mr. Schofield would have wished her to go. She had set her teeth, and made a round of calls.

She did not, however, see fit to specify the date of her and her sister's departure, and had, as we know, only written to the Schofields when it had actually taken place.

To be now bowling along in the Rowlands' carriage! To be back in the neighborhood as the Rowlands' guests! To be looking upon it all, as it were, from the Rowlands' standpoint! It did feel odd, incongruous, unnatural. The Rowlands, who had been so little to them once, to be now their all! People talked to them as if they and the Rowlands were one. Arrangements were made, invitations given and accepted; future plans discussed, as if all were one family, one household; and though unable to demur to such a state of things, Monica was conscious of some secret reservations on the subject.

She had asked to go alone to the Schofields; she could not have explained why, but it would have disconcerted her to be taken thither under Mr. Rowland's wing; and infinitely less refined and cultivated as were her relations at the Grange, her heart went out to them in a way that astonished herself. They would have shown to as little advantage in the presence of Mrs. Rowland, a stately and somewhat formal matron, as in

that of the timid, insipid, elegant Lady Dorrien. Of the two, indeed, Lady Dorrien would have put them more at their ease. She would have done anything she was bidden do, and refrained from seeing anything as to which she had been desired to be blind, if only she might please Sir Arthur—but Mrs. Rowland would have been less accommodating.

Monica could see, and it amused her to see, that in the eyes of all Ernest's people, the Schofield connection was the fly in the ointment as regarded the forthcoming marriage. She had caught the words "Only *second* cousins," more than once repeated with considerable emphasis, when the neighboring families had neighbor-like alluded to the occupants of the Grange. Obviously the Grange was to Oldfield its wincing point. This was a new discovery to Monica. "I am learning a great deal," she said to herself.

She had therefore boldly requested to go alone on the day after Christmas Day, and had done so, and found all the family at home, even to George, who had taken a holiday although at that period, Boxing Day was not as now a general holiday, a holiday on account of its being Boxing Day.

They did not shine, poor folks; and their visitor was still more glad than before, that she had brought none of the well-mannered, superior Rowlands with her. For herself, she could endure with perfect equanimity the anxious hospitalities and effusive congratulations of worthy Mrs. Schofield, could see in them and hear in them only the kind heart beating beneath,—but it would have been too much to have had Isabel's future connections present.

The scene was something like this:

"Now, Monica, do tell me the ups and downs of it all; the whole story about Bell and her engagement," cried mama, bumping into her great chair by the fire. "Now, girls, do hold your tongues, all of you; and let Monica speak. Monica, my dear, whatever are you eating bread-and-butter for, when here are the crumpets all nice and hot? Now just put away that bread-and-butter; Daisy, take it from her; that's right; now pull round her chair that I may see her. Well, I do say she is looking well; isn't she, George? Oh, George, oh,—"

with a sudden and most transparent recollection. "Oh, George, my—my dear, just take off your great thick boots, won't you? Look what they have left on the carpet there!" pointing to small cakes of mashed-up snow which marked his steps.

"George 'balls' like a horse," said Monica, bursting out laughing as she too looked.

"Anyone would 'ball' who had been out where I have been," protested he, somewhat gruffly. "What harm can snow do to anything?" And he came and stood in front of the fire.

"He is the worst of them all," reflected Miss Lavenham, her laugh dying away. She did not pretend not to know, she was perfectly cognizant of the feeling which made him keep his gronnd. Nevertheless, looking upon the featureless, sodden, unintelligent face, slouching shoulders, and boorish attitudes before her, she did not, I must own, feel any very great pity for George. Like Daisy, she thought to herself, "*George!*" —and was merciless.

Yet Mrs. Schofield was now haunted by one daily fear, namely, that George would be entrapped into matrimony. In every amiable young person who was attentive to her, or who smiled while shaking hands with her son, she beheld an aspirant for the hand of the head of the firm. As the head of the firm she now looked upon her firstborn; and truth to tell, she was at the very moment, cogitating within her secret soul, whether Isabel having done so well as to secure young Rowland, Monica had not made up her mind to rival her by having young Schofield. Monica's coming over alone and so soon, favored the notion,—but certainly Monica's air, and manner, and a certain thrill of contempt in her laugh, went far towards dispelling it. "Well, if George would only get out of the way," she began, peering round and round him, to catch her visitor's eye.

"Why should I get out of the way?" demanded he. "You are always wanting me out of the way. So is Daisy. What harm do I do you? I am sure I am not so much at home but that you might endure the sight of me once and away."

"Well, no, of course; of course you are right,

George:" George's mother was melted in an instant; "but, you see, we want to see Monica."

"So do I want to see Monica. I have not seen her for as long as you." Monica quietly moved to another chair.

"There now, that's right; now we're all pleased," and Mrs. Schofield sank back contentedly; "now, Monica, let us hear you talk. Tell us about the engagement —and about the marriage—and how you like it—how your uncle and aunt like it—and oh, poor cousin Joseph, how pleased he would have been! And to think of your being back here not two months after you left—you that we thought had gone for good! But London suits you, Monica; or else it is something else which suits you, for I never saw you looking handsomer. And there's a compliment from an old lady, if you please."

At last Daisy took her mother by the shoulders. "If we are to hear a word from Monica," she said, "somebody else must be quiet. You want to hear what Monica has got to say, don't you?"

"There is no occasion for you to put in your oar, all the same," muttered George. He was certainly not a pleasant member of a family circle. No communications produced from him a response, neither did maternal appeals an acquiescence. He listened to all that was said, and each speaker by turns felt that he was internally passing his own comments. It would have been a relief to have had him go. He had, however, his reasons for staying, and at length these appeared.

"Are you here for long?" he inquired abruptly, during a pause, wherein Mrs. Schofield fanned herself, as was her wont when warmed by discussion, and Daisy sat considering what she should ask about next.

"Not very long," replied Monica. "We shall have a good deal to do when we get back to town."

"To town? That's London. Where are you going to in London?"

"Oh, to Queen's Gate," said Monica, smiling. Her smile was for herself. "Mrs. Rowland is to keep house there for the next month, in order to make it all right and proper, so that we shall be with them, I fancy, till

the wedding takes place. It is not as if we had anywhere else to go," she added, quietly.

"Are you going to the Carnforths' to-morrow?"

"To the ball? I believe so. I believe every one is going. There is a large party at Oldfield." This had satisfied George, and sent him away at last. Of his subsequent indignation and unavailing gloom, when he found he had been in his own phrase "done" in the matter—for he, no more than others, had faith in the headache—it boots not here to speak. He had at last taken himself off his mother's rug, and left the three ladies alone. Two of them wondered whether the third would not bethink herself of retiring also.

"We might have a nice talk," reflected Monica. "I could tell Daisy a great deal, and feel that she would understand things. Daisy has so much sense. And—and we might talk of other matters besides Bell's engagement. I am just a very, very little tired of hearing about nothing else than this engagement. It is dreadfully selfish of me: but, when morning, noon, and night, every single person who comes up with a smile, begins with some little speech or other, invariably including 'your sister's engagement,' it does begin to pall. We shall settle down soon, and have done with the novelty of the thing, and the repetition of the same phrases for everybody; and when we go back to Town and begin the shopping it will be very good fun. There will be the presents, too, and all kinds of things going on. But I should, oh, I should have liked to have dropped Bell and Ernest for an hour or so while I am in this house; —oh, she is actually going!" Marvellous to relate, the worthy mother was, by slow degrees, easing herself of her cumbrous chair, and preparing to sally forth. She had caught Daisy's eye.

Directly they were alone Daisy came close, and put her arm round Monica's neck. "I want to say something," she began.

"Say on," said Monica. Each felt no need of circumlocution.

"Monica, tell me—I am sure you will tell me—what passed between you and Mr. Dorrien before he left."

"I wished to tell you, Daisy." The tone of the speaker was calm and gentle, as that of the other had

been; and if the pulses of each fair one beat a little faster than was their wont at the mention of a certain name, no one would have guessed it. "I only saw Mr. Dorrien once after that dreadful day," proceeded Monica. "You remember that he was with us, that it was he who told us what had happened. Afterwards I thought I should wait till after the—the funeral, before admitting him again; and then—you know, Daisy, what happened then."

"I know."

"He left Cullingdon immediately, and I thought—everyone thought—he had gone for altogether. People must have guessed why—but it was the best thing he could do. You heard of his going, did you not?"

"Vaguely, yes. But I heard—we heard—at least I thought we heard that he had come back again."

"What did you hear besides?" said Monica, breathing quickly.

"That you were seen together on board the Birkenhead boat," replied Daisy in a low voice. "And *some* declared that he had gone on with you to London."

"That last was false, Daisy."

"I never believed it, dear."

"You good, kind girl!" exclaimed Monica impetuously. "I think you are the truest friend woman ever had. When will you believe ill of me, Daisy?"

"When I see it, Monica."

"You have seen it to your cost, God knows!" cried Monica with sudden bitterness. "But you still love me, still believe in me; if ever I am worth anything in this world, or another, it will be to you that I owe it. Now, I will tell you the whole truth—the truth which I have not dared to confide even to my own sister. Bell, you know," smiling, "is not exactly discreet, and I have always had to keep something from her. Now, of course poor child, everything goes straight to Ernest, so I shall have to be on my guard more than ever—only now, now," with a restless movement, "there is nothing to be on my guard about."

Her cousin stooped and kissed her brow. "Tell me the tale," she said.

Half an hour later, when Mrs. Schofield came back,

the tale had been told, and even she could gather as much.

"I suppose you wanted a word with her about that Dorrien affair," she said, as soon as the visitor had departed. "What had Monica to say for herself?"

"What I knew she would have to say. Her meeting with Mr. Dorrien was by the purest accident, and he merely saw them into the train for London, as any gentleman would have done. He did not even go up by the same train."

"It was a queer accident, all the same," observed Mrs. Schofield, sententiously. "I don't put much faith in those kind of accidents."

"You must put faith in Monica, mamma."

"Well, I don't know; I suppose I must," with a dubious brow; "but, however," rejoined Mrs. Schofield, taking refuge in her favorite formula, "but, however, Daisy, child, Monica has only to answer for herself. It may have been accident with *her*, but it was none with *him*, I'll vouch for him."

"He declared it was, and Monica believed him. Besides, he could not have known their intentions, for they had confided them to no one."

"Ah, there you are now; now I believe you," cried Mrs. Schofield, feeling very shrewd and practical. "If you can give me any reason why Mr. Dorrien *could* not know, then, say I, let him not know. But if he had fished out, by hook or by crook, that those girls were crossing the river to go on their travels from the other side, I'll never believe to my dying day but what he went the same way on purpose."

"If he had, I should not have blamed him."

"Blamed him? I don't know about that. He had made her enough talked about as it was. First, it was all over the place that he was after her; then that he was off with her; and I think the least he could do after all that, was not to meet her on the Birkenhead boat."

"But I think," mused poor Daisy to herself, "that if it had been me, I should have found no fault with such a meeting."

She had listened to Monica with tingling veins and a burning cheek. Almost every syllable of the recital gave her pain, and yet it was pain of such a strange

nature that she would not have spared one throb of it. It caused her an exquisite, mysterious, inexplicable joy to feel its torture. Souls who suffer for one another have, 'tis said, such joy. This poor, little, insignificant, uninteresting Daisy Schofield hugged it to her bosom.

She flew away to be alone and indulge in her treasure. She pictured to herself the deepening fog, the clanging bells, the whole weird scene; she felt, as though she were Monica herself, the other's sense of desolation and loneliness; stood, as Monica had stood, gazing listlessly on the arriving passengers; beheld Dorrien; walked away; was conscious that he followed, knew he was there. But here the curtain fell.

The narrator's voice had ceased. The rest was left to imagination and conviction.

That all had been explained and forgiven, was, however, manifest.

The two had parted with no embittering restraint and reserve; they had parted, it might be, to meet no more this side the grave; but—had parted as lovers should.

"There is nothing now to separate them," said little Daisy to herself with a sigh, "nothing but this miserable, miserable money.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A PRUDENTIAL MOVE.

I *know* I do not love thee. Yet, alas!
Others will scarce believe my candid heart.
And oft I catch them smiling as they pass
Because they see me gazing where thou art.—Mrs. NORTON.

MISERABLE money is, however, an awkward customer to deal with. Dorrien had none; Monica had none; and there was now no one on either side to give or to leave them any. Had the former been a younger man many paths in life might indeed have been open; but it must be borne in mind that for none of these paths had he ever been equipped, and he was now past the age for learning.

Easy as many found it to say sneeringly of Dorrien,

"Let him work," they knew in their heart of hearts that work of any kind such as he could produce would fail to find a market. It is only in fiction that heroes in adverse circumstances instantly develop abnormal talent and industry. Dorrien was not clever, and he had been bred to be an idler.

After a time, Monica told herself that she had ceased to think about her former lover. She would always look back upon a certain period of her life with tenderness, would always meet anyone who hailed from a certain quarter of England with alacrity, and would always cherish both affection and respect for the cousin whom she had least expected to evoke either.

But London life is in its way absorbing. Isabel's marriage had swiftly and easily reinstated both sisters in their former position; had opened up new occupations and outlets; produced new interests—in short, done all that such an union could do to efface the past and make bright the future. It had been so earnestly, nay, so obstinately, insisted upon that Monica's home should be with her sister, and Monica had known so certainly that for a time at least Bell would feel lost without her, that she had consented to become an inmate of the mansion in Queen's Gate—and this meant a great deal.

It meant having a share in every sort of duty and pleasure. After the wedding there had begun the inevitable dinner-parties and theatre-parties; then an increase of visiting cards on the hall table every afternoon, which had resulted in a fresh influx of engagements and arrangements; and finally had come the great rush of the London season.

Young Mrs. Rowland and her lovely sister were to be seen everywhere. Their familiar faces once more adorned familiar haunts, and Monica was agreeably surprised to find that even her anticipations were outstripped by the conduct of a world which worships success.

Isabel Lavenham had not, it is true, made a great match; she had not become a duchess, nor a countess, nor even a great county lady—but she had wealth and a presentable husband: it was felt that she had married, in popular phrase, up to her form. As a novice she might indeed have been passed by unnoticed; but as

Colonel Lavenham's pretty niece, now creditably wedded, she had crowds of visitors, and more invitations than she knew what to do with.

It was Monica who kept her from accepting them all; Monica who weighed the merits of conflicting proposals; and Monica who steadily set her face against the worthless and unprincipled. But for her sister, Bell might have won over an affectionate husband, and have repented doing so too late,—but Monica held her back. She could not make head against Monica's frowns when joined to Ernest's reluctance.

"It seems rather a pity," she would murmur,—but Monica would toss up her head. She could still toss her head, and she was not one to let all the experience of the past six months be absolutely unproductive.

"A pity, my dear Bell?" she would cry. "A pity that you are not to be caught in a glittering spider's web which would swallow up alive such a poor little fly as you? A pity that these bold, ill-mannered women who turned their backs upon us in our day of adversity are not to fatten upon you in your prosperity? Lady Mount Ryan is a gambler, a cheat, all that is odious and intolerable. What do you lose by not going to her house? I often wondered that uncle Lavenham took us there. She thinks now that she will 'produce' you as one of the frisky young matrons for whose *entourage* she is famous. That is all she wants of you—unless it be to pick your pocket besides. Then what does Lady Bagshot want? She wants Ernest; wants him to hang about her carriage in the park; to call upon her on Sunday afternoons; to be spoken of as her 'dear Adonis,' her 'foolish young Apollo Belvidere.' Ernest is good to look at, you know, Bell. I am up to her ladyship's little ways. Now, my dear child, you and I have a part to play, and though it is easier than the part we had in Lowndes Square or at Flodden Hall, we cannot afford to be caught at a vantage. Bell," more earnestly—"Bell, we are *not* going on as we began, are we? We do wish to live better, truer, more worthy lives than we have done up till now, do we not? *I* do, and I am sure you do. Then the very first thing is to show this openly. It is a great chance—the first we have ever had. We can really choose for once whom

we will know and whom we will not. Ernest leaves it to you; but his friends are all that either of us can wish. For heaven's sake, Bell, dear Bell, do not let us drag him at our chariot wheels in any direction that he would not of himself have taken."

"I am so glad you think so well of Ernest," said Bell, kissing her.

Thereupon she would contentedly let go the great ladies of doubtful repute, and would find her reward in Monica's nod of approval and Ernest's smile.

It was not, however, quite so easy to be complacent when Monica refused offer after offer on her own account.

Isabel thought that now was Monica's opportunity.

Even Colonel Lavenham, who, true to his character, returned in May—to take advantage of a few weeks of fine weather, according to himself; to indulge in regimental dinners and banquets, according to his eldest niece—even he owned that he was struck by Monica's superb beauty. Isabel was looking somewhat delicate; late hours and endless parties were overtaxing her strength; and the colonel counselled an early retirement from the scene, and a little wholesome rustication, on her behalf; but he could not take his eyes off Monica.

Would she—hum—ha—would she care to run across the Channel with him presently, and have a look at her aunt? Her aunt would soon be at Homburg for the baths. The Homburg baths were all the rage, and half the people he knew would be there in July. Would Monica think of it? Her aunt would be delighted. Young Lord Harbery was going there too, by the way.

Monica thanked her uncle, but did not see her way to considering the proposal. She had promised Bell to go with her to some quiet sea-place, where Ernest could only join them from time to time; and Bell was depending on her.

That being the case, of course the colonel gallantly gave way. His dear Isabel must indubitably be first under such circumstances; but perhaps in the winter, if Monica inclined towards wintering in the Riviera—he fancied Cannes was to be their destination towards the end of the year—he could answer for no end of

welcome on the part of her aunt, and he would not say but he might himself be induced to come over and act as escort.

He was again thanked, but nothing was promised.

When he rejoined his wife, he told her that Monica had been cool upon it. "Uncommonly cool and distant," he said. "The girl has got to know her own value, and means to make her own market. I daresay she thinks that we botched it before, and we are not to have the chance again. 'Pon my word, I think they do us very great injustice. If you and I had not taken the precise step we did, where would they have been now? Meandering about the Continent with no proper claim upon anybody, and seeing no one likely ever to give them a claim. I invited Monica to come, because I found that several young fellows were coming who had been in her train over there; and some of them at least were worth looking after. I even mentioned young Harbery. But she evidently distrusted me. She thinks she can play her own hand,—so all I have now to say is, 'Let her.' Certes, she has certainly done well for Isabel, so I suppose we ought not to grumble. We must get a put-up at Queen's Gate ourselves next spring. I reconnoitred the house, and it is a capital one—good stabling and everything. Rowland lunched at my club, and I did the civil by him. A stupid sort of fellow, but quite gentlemanlike. On the whole the marriage is a first-rate speculation, and we may thank our stars it came off."

At another time it was: "The Dorriens were friendly to the girls when they were in Lancashire. Old Sir Arthur is very shaky, Monica says. He was always a feeble creature. They had been at Cullingdon. It was ten miles from Mr. Schofield's place—a fine old estate, but impoverished. I made Monica tell me all about it. There is an only son out in Australia. I did not hear much about him. I don't fancy they saw anything of him."

Again: "Old Joseph must have been a perfect godsend to those girls. Such presents! Such jewels! And by all accounts they ruled the roast completely—trust Monica for that. Did what they pleased—went where they pleased—dragged him about after them, giv-

ing him no choice in anything! And what do you think Monica told me? By Jove! it made me hot and cold to think of it! If he had lived only one day longer, those two would have inherited all he possessed! She had it from himself. They had kept it quiet hitherto, not liking to bruit it abroad and have a fuss; but once when I was hinting in an easy sort of way about Joseph—perhaps saying a little more than I should have said in the way of astonishment that he should have made such an iniquitous will, considering he had his own sister's only children left destitute on his hands—out it all came. He had taken her aside the very day, within the very hour that he was brought home dead, to tell her that she and Bell were to have it all."

"What a shocking thing!" simpered Mrs. Lavenham.

"A shocking thing of course, and worse than shocking—a piece of thundering bad luck. One day—one single day—and the two would have been heiresses! As it was, they got not a farthing! There's fate for you! I always said Joseph was a trump, and I never owed him a grudge in my own mind for what happened. I had a sneaking certainty that he had only needed time to do the right thing. To be sure," after a few reflective turns up and down the room, "to be sure, Bell is as well off as she need be, and this marriage might not have come in her way if she had got Joseph Schofield's money. I dare say she would have turned up her nose at Rowland then; Monica is too fine for anybody as it is."

Monica had been too fine for his eligible men. She saw nothing in any of them to attract, and no special reason for being attracted. She was conscious, as she could not help being conscious, of her beauty and her wit; she was secure of a home; and she allowed to herself that among the crowds she daily met she had as yet seen no one to compare with Dorrien. Till that should happen, she would let matrimony alone. She was now twenty-one, and had plenty of time before her. Time was needed, but time would of a surety do its part.

Thus the summer passed away.

Winter brought its new domestic interest in the shape of Isabel's baby.

Lapped in luxury, while at the same time guarded by common sense, young Mrs. Rowland was speedily her-

self again, and a brighter, sweeter self than she had ever been before. The joy of motherhood adorned and irradiated her. Happiness spiritualized her character. She no longer needed to be checked, restrained, and turned hither and thither from this and that forbidden fruit. The fruit had lost for her its bloom ; the taste for it was gone ; swallowed up in purer delights.

Oh, the joyous bustle, the excitement, the impatience of getting down to Oldfield now !

Christmas Eve was once more to be waited for, since Ernest could not get away before ; but a saloon-carriage was engaged, and every arrangement made which could prevent the precious baby and the precious mother from experiencing the slightest shadow of discomfort either from crowds or weather. Bell, muffled in sables, Ernest's latest gift, stepped out of her well-warmed carriage, followed by that most important personage, Mrs. Nurse, bearing the little one wrapped in his froth of billowy lace ; while a gorgeous footman carried his lady's travelling bag and wraps behind. Ernest was in waiting on the platform. Mrs. Rowland's maid was already making all comfortable within the saloon.

But where was Monica ? Monica did not on this occasion accompany her sister. She was no longer so necessary to Bell as she had once been ; and, to tell the truth, she did not feel that Oldfield would amuse her at the moment. Her regard for the Oldfield people was great ; her satisfaction that Isabel was every day more and more assimilating herself with them was unfeigned ; and she would have bitten her tongue in half before she would have let fall a hint that she found a flaw in any one of the connection. But she was not herself a Rowland, and she was subject to occasional fits of yawning in the Rowland family circle. Happily, however, these were unsuspected by the supremely satisfied young wife, and Monica was only too well pleased that they should be so. She by no means intended to be at Isabel's elbow all her life. Fond as she was of her only sister, this was the last thing she desired or thought likely to happen ; and, if Bell did not now learn to live alone, she never would.

Wherefore, as Christmas Eve approached, Miss Lavenham made a stand.

"No, my dear, I am not going to Oldfield with you—you need not think it. Your suite is sufficient. With your husband, your nurse, your maid, and your footman, you may manage to do without your sister. You enjoyed your last Christmas at Oldfield immensely, but this year you will reign there like a queen. Do you think I am always going to play second fiddle? Not I. Disabuse your mind of that idea. I mean to go and queen it myself elsewhere. So now you know, and no more is to be said."

And the speaker looked merry and mischievous, and would not tell where she was going.

"I really cannot guess," quoth Bell, plaintively. "She will not say, Ernest. Is it not too bad of her? I know of course that she has heaps of houses to go to, but I cannot think why there should be any mystery in the case, unless—oh, you naughty Monica!" all at once becoming very beaming and significant.

As suddenly did the glow die out of the face opposite.

"Why am I a 'naughty Monica'?" demanded Miss Lavenham, cold as ice.

"Are you going to—let me whisper," suiting the action to the word.

"Certainly not," replied Monica sharply. "How could you think so? You do not suppose I would throw myself in a man's way whom I had refused? And you cannot, you *cannot* imagine I should ever do anything but refuse him?"

Ernest had prudently turned away.

"Oh, I don't know," said Bell, somewhat crestfallen. "I am sure Lord Harbery is very nice."

"Pshaw! A monkey-faced creature! No, indeed. Make your mind easy, my dear. I shall not ask you to present a fright as a brother-in-law. You have got a handsome husband. I mean to have a handsome husband too, when I have one at all."

"Oho! You do mean to have one?"

"Of course I do. Every girl does. But 'meaning' does not make the world wag. I am not a woman of action. I shall wait till I am attacked, Isabel. I am heart-whole," fixing her eyes on her sister's face, and speaking in a clear, deliberate tone, "and heart-whole people have a merry time of it. So now, my love, you

to your pleasures, I to mine. You betake yourself to the paternal home, where every sort of welcome—Yule logs, holly wreaths, mistletoe boughs, and Christmas checks—await you, and I will seek mine own elsewhere. By-and-by I shall again appear in Queen's Gate, and we will talk over our adventures."

Further than that she would not go.

Bell could not make it out. Ernest thought he could. He knew that Sir Arthur Dorrien had died in the late autumn, and that he had left his heir a worse than empty title, one burdened with debt. It was possible that Dorrien might have to return home, but if so, he would return as he went; wherefore, if so, in his own mind Mr. Rowland agreed with Monica that for her to be in the neighborhood would be unfortunate.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MONICA WENT QUIETLY UPSTAIRS.

But when my heart
In one frail ark had ventured all . . .
Then came the thunderbolt.—Mrs HEMANS.

"HE'LL come back with an Australian heiress, as sure as fate!" cried Mrs. Schofield about this time. "That's what he'll do," alluding to the new Sir Harry. "I know their ways. Now that he can make his wife 'my lady,' and bring her home to Cullingdon Manor—rubbishy old place though it is—he'll find no difficulty in picking up a heathen Chinee with plenty of money. What? What do you say? There's no Chinese in Australia? Who said there was? It is only my way of talking, and you know well enough what I mean, George. And you know you said yourself——"

"—What did I say myself?" demanded he, as she stopped short.

"Why, that we should see that Dorrien back again directly he heard of Sir Arthur's death."

"Well?"

"Well, my dear, ain't that just what I am saying?

What then makes you look sour milk at me? All I said was, we should see this fine Sir Harry, as he is now, turning up here some of these mornings."

"If you do, let me get out of the back door."

"Now, George, to bear him a grudge! All's well that ends well, say I. And as for keeping up that jealousy of yours against poor Sir Harry, not that he has got neither the one nor the other—you know what I mean—I must say I don't think it's what I can call Christian in you, George."

"Is Monica coming to Oldfield this Christmas?" he inquired abruptly.

"To be sure she is coming. That is to say, I suppose she is. I suppose she comes with Bell. Mrs. Rowland writes that they expect the party from Queen's Gate to-morrow and who should the party mean but Bell and Monica?"

"She did not say Monica?"

"No;—no. No, I can't exactly say she did."

He turned away.

"Why do you ask, George?" rejoined his mother, after one or two uneasy glances. "You might have seen Monica any time between last Christmas and this, if that was what you wanted. You had only to run up to London—or I am sure I would have asked her here——"

"—I don't want her asked here."

"Do you want to see her?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I wish I could understand you, George," with a sigh of perplexity. "You 'don't want' this, and you 'don't know' that, and yet you are so determined to hear what Mrs. Rowland said! Now, why should you care what Mrs. Rowland said? If Monica does not come——"

"—If Monica does not come"—he turned upon her fiercely—"I will tell you what it means. It means that she still cares for that fool Dorrien." And he threw down a parcel which was in his hand.

"Nay, now, I don't think you have a right to say that;" but the speaker was rudely arrested.

"No right? Why have I no right?" burst forth her son. "I have a right to say what I choose, and to think

what I choose. I say that Monica would come to the Rowlands' if she had no feeling still about—about the place; but if she has, she will stay away. *Now* you know why I don't want her asked here, and why I don't go up to London to see her there. I can wait," and he drew in his breath and set his lips.

"Poor George, he takes it so much to heart!" nodded his mother to herself, as he left the room. "Now he will be all in a twitter till this business is settled. Well, they may say what they please, but it's in my mind that we shall have to call on a new Lady Dorrien before we know where we are. And it would just be the very best thing to happen. George would then be settled in his mind; and if he fancies Monica, Monica let it be, for all Daisy's nonsense. Monica turn up her nose at my son, indeed! Monica has more sense. And George the head of the firm, too! But, however, that's the way sisters always go on about their brothers, though if they were other people's brothers we should hear a very different story. If George was Monica's brother now, we should have Daisy setting her cap at him; the finest young man in the place, and as clever as he is handsome," smoothing her side curls complacently.

Thus do mothers muse upon their sons.

"If Harry Dorrien comes home to look after his affairs, I think I could put him in for one or two good things that would go some way towards setting him on his legs," observed Mr. Carnforth about the same time. He had been getting firmer and firmer on his own legs ever since we last saw him. "A baronet's name is always worth having on a directors' list, and there are several vacancies at present. I wonder how I could get at Dorrien. He would not come down here unless he knew, and of course the thing would be to get him down here."

"Oh, do get him down, papa!" from Miss Ethel.

"Do get him down? That's easily said," rejoined her father, jocosely. "All of you women have a soft corner in your hearts for that fellow. He was as thorough a ne'er-do-well as I ever came across—and I dare say is no better, but rather worse, by now,—yet he

had but to look at a woman to make her stand by him, through thick and thin!"

"What you call a 'lady-killer,' eh?" subjoined Lionel, with a sneer. He could not yet forgive Dorrien for the thrill of interest and excitement which had gone the round of the circle on the occasion of the dinner-party which had now become historical.

Young Carnforth would not indeed of himself have observed Monica. Occupied with his own concerns, and with the impression he was desirous of making on the company in general and on the pretty blonde whom he had selected as the recipient of his attentions in particular, it was not until he found that the whole room was charged with electricity and quivering with sympathy over the other affair, that the superior beauty of Miss Lavenham discovered itself to his vision.

Suddenly he found himself and his fair-haired partner nowhere. He had intended exhibiting his devotion before an audience,—and the audience turned their heads the other way. He had meant the Miss Lavenhams especially to note upon what tenderly confidential terms he was with the peeress's daughter,—and the Miss Lavenhams, or at any rate Miss Lavenham, saw only a very different person.

All the consequence, all the *éclat* of his flirtation had been completely disposed of. So very tame indeed had it been to go on being engrossed with a young lady of whom no one else present required anything, that he had actually ended by devoting himself to the mamma instead, and looking abnormally grave over a book of prints as he sat beside her on the sofa.

Dorrien and Monica had been ensconced on a similar sofa within the round window, well in the view of all, his open courtship winning her smiling acceptance,—all the world called to witness, because all the world was nothing to either at the moment.

Young Carnforth would never lose a chance of putting in a word to Dorrien's detriment thereafter. The idea of Dorrien's return had been distasteful in the extreme to him. In his own mind he was now busied concocting hints and innuendoes concerning Australian life which an auditor might or might not fit on to the

head of the new baronet. Scepticism would of course receive his immediate acquiescence, and Sir Harry might depend on an effusive demonstration of welcome at any moment required,—but a sly look would meet a sly look. If Lionel's companions winked to him, he would wink to them; and he now invariably held a wink in readiness when Dorrien's name was mentioned.

"Can you tell me how to get at Harry Dorrien?" inquired Mr. Carnforth the same afternoon of Captain Alverstoke, whom he chanced to meet in Liverpool. It was an open winter, and Alverstoke was down for hunting. He had just arrived from London, and was on his way to his own place in the neighborhood when thus accosted.

"Harry Dorrien? Oh! Sir Harry will turn up now, I suppose," he made answer. "Somebody knew where to write to him, I suppose?"

It struck them both at the same instant that it was quite possible that nobody did know where to write. Sir Arthur himself had not known, and when closely pressed had avouched as much. He had done so with a passing shame. Some twinge of conscience the old man had certainly had, in that he had doomed to exile his only child. He had bred his heir to pauperism. He had by the most forcible of all arguments bidden him barter his handsome face and beggared title for well-filled coffers; and it was only when the bubble burst which had been dangled before the eyes of both, that his cold heart had owned a faint glow of pity for his son.

Nay, while watching Harry from beneath his half-closed lids throughout the first hour or two after it became known that all was over, he had experienced a sense of dull, undefined anxiety.

Finally, there had been a scene, an explosion. Reproaches and recriminations had hissed through the air; bitter taunts and gibes flung after them. Dorrien had demanded this: Was there anything, however little, for him? He had been told there was nothing. He had gone to his room. The next day the room was empty—the son had left.

Ultimately, however, as we know, Dorrien had re-

turned for a few hours to Cullingdon, urged by necessity, and perhaps by a lingering fragment of better feeling; and had taken what all felt to be a final farewell of his parents. He had written home after a time—he did not wish to disappear melodramatically—and the letter with its *bonâ fide* address had been sent to Alverstoke. Alverstoke had lost not a mail in replying, but to his letter no response had come. As the letter had been of importance, and of possibly pleasant, certainly not of unpleasant importance, he could form no other conjecture than that it had been lost.

Being of an easy nature, he did not give himself much concern in the matter. If Harry Dorrien should turn up, well and good; should by any chance be able to repay him his loan of four thousand pounds, still more well and good; but if, on the other hand, nothing further were heard of Dorrien, he could not help it. Nothing having been heard by the time he went back to London about the middle of January, he formed his own conclusions.

"Gone a-mucker," he said to himself. "Those Dorriens are all Ds of another sort at bottom."

It chanced that he was standing in the window of his club a few weeks after this. It was a cold, brilliant afternoon; but the air had only a delicious exhilaration for the young and rich; and the gayly attired fair ones who, clad in velvet and fur, reclined at ease in open landau, barouche, or victoria, whirling in swift succession along that fashionable quarter, looking all the better and brighter for the bloom the fresh clear atmosphere brought to their rounded cheeks.

Within a handsomely appointed equipage sat two erect, graceful young figures, whose outlines at once caught the eye of our lounger. He started, bent quickly forward, and appeared desirous of ascertaining whether or not his first glimpse had been one of correct recognition, or whether he had been misled by a fancied resemblance.

In a few seconds he had obviously ascertained which. "It is she," he muttered, watching with a frown the carriage which, entangled in a block, had come to a standstill exactly opposite the window. "It

is that jade who drove him to it. Poor fellow! Poor Dorrien! She might have had the decency to remain within doors at least for to-day, instead of flaunting about in scarlet ribbons. To be sure she may not yet know, but still she knows enough. Eh?" to a new comer who approached and looked over his shoulder.

"What is it, Alverstoke?"

"What's what?"

"What are you frowning and muttering about? Who goes there? Who are those beauties you are eying with such a power of vengeance?"

"St. George, you have heard about poor Dorrien?"

"By Jove! yes, poor fellow! Awfully shocked, of course. But what has that to do with you—what are you looking at?"

"Do you see that carriage?" said Alverstoke, in a hard voice, for he was as much moved as his easy phlegmatic nature was capable of being. "Do you see those girls in it?"

"The Lavenhans? I used to know the Lavenhams once. I don't know Mrs. What's-her-name now. Such a deuced way off to go and call. But what about them?"

"Did you ever see Miss Lavenham looking better?"

"No, by Jove! I dare say not. But what—you are not gone on her, Archie, my boy? It's no go. She would not look at you. She is for your betters."

"And when she's done with my betters," said Archie, bitterly, "she drives over their necks. St. George, that girl broke Dorrien's heart. Look at her now!" and again he pointed with his finger.

The carriage rolled out of sight.

"Good heavens! you don't say so!" exclaimed St. George with a stare. "That was what made you look so ghostly, was it? How did you know? How did you pick it up?"

"I knew from his own lips. I picked it up with my own eyes. Why, you were there too. Can you not remember that night at the Carnforths'? Those Carnforths in Lancashire? A year and a half ago? Just before Dorrien went abroad? That was why he went. Perhaps I ought not to have said she broke his heart," gloomily, "for I dare say she would have married him if she could,—but the fact was she couldn't. There was

no money. I might have felt sorry for her, if I had not seen her to-day. But she must know—she must have heard. It was in all the posters yesterday in capital letters, and one brute bellowed it under my nose as I came along here. I call it an infernal thing for a girl to be driving in an open carriage beneath the very windows of his club, when everyone inside is talking of his suicide."

"She may not have heard, all the same, Alverstoke."

And she had not heard.

The brief paragraph with its heading, "Suicide of Sir Harry Luke Dorrien," had, it is true, been so forced upon the notice of every passer-by along the London thoroughfares, that Captain Alverstoke was to be excused for supposing it impossible that it could have escaped any eye, since, even supposing Miss Lavenham had not been out of doors, she must of a certainty have been informed by others. But the truth was that Monica had been absent from London, and had only just rejoined her sister at the expiration of their several Christmas visits. When beheld in Piccadilly, Bell was driving her home from Waterloo Station.

Thus easy is it to misjudge.

Isabel had herself only arrived the night before, and her husband had not yet followed her from Liverpool; he was in the hall however as they gayly alighted, and bounded up the steps, their ringing voices preceding them, reunion and gladness in every note.

Somewhat silently and, if such a thing could have been supposed, somewhat nervously Mr. Rowland embraced his wife, and took her sister's hand. "Just arrived, Monica? Bell met you all right, I hope? You are well, I hope? If you go upstairs, I'll—I'll—follow. Bell," in an almost soundless aside, "one moment, Bell, my dear," and he drew her within a room.

Monica ran up. "Conjugal conferences, I suppose," said she to herself, lightly. "I hope the conjugal conference will not be of very long duration."

It was not. Only a few minutes had passed ere the door opened behind her, but, rather to her surprise, it was not her sister but Ernest who entered. "Isabel is a little upset," he observed, hurriedly. "We have just

heard of the death of an old friend. I heard on my way up. You did not notice it in the newspapers?" busying himself with his gloves.

"I have not seen a paper to-day. I am ashamed to say I was interested in my book, and thought news would keep. Besides, I knew we should hear whatever there was from you to-night, Ernest."

"Yes, to be sure," said he, very gravely.

"But I am very sorry. An old friend of yours? But you said 'of ours.' How can you and Bell have any 'old friend' whom——" Monica broke off with a sudden suspicion, followed by numbness all over. "Who is it, Ernest?"

She supposed it was herself speaking, but the voice sounded strangely in her ears.

"It is Harry Dorrien," replied her brother-in-law, turning away his head.

There was a frozen silence.

"When?"

She forced the word at last from her lips.

"The news was telegraphed yesterday."

"How?"

There was another long silence.

It was broken at last: she could have wished it never had been broken at all.

"By his own hand."

Monica went quietly upstairs.

It needed this, yet it needed *but* this, to let her know forevermore the truth about her heart.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CONCLUSION.

Tempestuous fortune hath spent all his spight,
And thrilling sorrow thrown his utmost dart.—SPENSER.

IT was between two and three months after this that a communication was received by Miss Lavenham as to which she was somewhat reserved for an hour or so after it came by post,

There were others at the breakfast table.

Alone, however, with her sister and Ernest—Ernest who had grown upon her affections strangely of late, and from whom secrets were now but rarely kept—Monica told a little piece of news. "She has left me all her money," she said, simply. "That was what the lawyer wrote about this morning."

There had been another death, another sudden, unforeseen end of a young life since last we saw Monica Lavenham; all were now in mourning for the loss of poor little Daisy Schofield, to suit the feelings of the one who mourned in reality.

There had been but a brief illness. A chill had been caught, fever and inflammation had set in, and within a few days all was over.

Monica had felt her cousin's loss, but perhaps she had not felt it quite so keenly as she would have done a little while before. She had not seen Daisy for above a year, and since then—since then so much had happened. It seemed to her sometimes as if she never could feel anything very much again. Her uncle's fatal accident had been a severe shock to her, the cutting short of the present youthful life saddened and dejected her; but the passion of horror which swept across her soul at the tidings of Dorrien's death, had made and still made, every lesser grief shudder into insignificance before it.

Day and night the sight was ever before her eyes.

In dreams her hand once again clasped Harry Dorrien's hand, her eyes gazed into his eyes, her cheek felt the touch of his lips. Morning after morning she awakened with wet eyelids and sobbing breath, tortured by the vanishing of the mirage, by the agony of too swift remembrance.

She had grown pale, thin, and spiritless, beneath the burden which none could share.

Daisy's death, poor little Daisy's simple death came almost like a tender excuse for sorrow. It was a relief to lay her head upon the pillow and shed tears that needed not to be carefully effaced, or else explained away.

She had said she would go down to Lancashire and follow the coffin to its quiet graveyard. Would Ernest's

parents have her? Would they let her go from Oldfield? She did not like to intrude on the immediate family circle at the Grange, but she was sure of the gratitude and approval such an act would excite; and on her part it was but a trifling effort to make. She was bent on making the effort.

She had been talking of this, and it had been settled she should go—should go by the two o'clock train, on the very morning the lawyer's letter was brought in. The significance of the document was at first sight lost upon Monica. Curiously enough her first thought was, "I hope they will not think I have gone down to-day because of this," and the propriety of letting Mrs. Schofield know by some means or other that her intentions had been fixed before anything whatever had been heard, filled her mind for the first few minutes.

But presently she had begun to wonder why so strange a step had been taken, and then, as by a lightning flash, the truth revealed itself. Daisy had meant her to wed Dorrien, and Dorrien was now no more.

So great was her agony beneath the thought that it almost seemed as though no other pangs could ever have before preceded it.

The will had in all probability been made some time before, made in a fit of girlish enthusiasm under the impulse of generosity, and it had never been cancelled. Had Daisy even wished to cancel it? Who could tell?

A little note was handed to Monica by the weeping mother as soon as the last rites were over, and she had by request returned with the bereaved family to their home. "You can go to the Rowlands presently, you know, Monica," said poor Mrs. Schofield, holding on by the skirts which she was afraid were about to vanish. "But come with us first, there's a dear. I have something to tell you. You have heard about the money, Monica?" in her ear. "Yes, Mr. Adamson told George he had written; and this note is from him, asking for an appointment, I suppose. And George says I am to tell you that we all approve; being as you were in a manner disappointed of your uncle's money; though I did say, 'What would poor Grandpapa have thought!' But don't you mind me, Monica, my girl; for I now you loved my Daisy that's gone;

and if you and George—but what am I saying?" Come in and have a glass of wine, my poor dear; and try if you can eat something—for I am sure I can't."

Presently it was "We do take it kind of you to come, Monica. I am sure when I saw you I gave such a start, though I had seen the Rowlands' carriage—but I never dreamed of its having *you* in it. Tottie, my dearie, give Monica another glass—just half a glass then, there's a good girl. You don't look a bit yourself, Monica, not a bit; and it isn't all the black dress neither. You have had your share of trouble," in a loud whisper, with a squeeze of a sympathetic hand, "and poor Daisy, you see, would have spared you some of it if she could; but there, Providence always knows what's best, strange as life is—and when you are as old as I am, you will learn to say God's will be done," and the poor fond creature wiped and wiped her eyes, over and over again.

Monica regarded her tenderly. A mother is sacred in such an hour. She took her hand—she took George's hand. Even his poor sullen face was transformed for her. He loved her; she had often scoffed at his love; on this day she felt grateful for it.

How good they were, one and all! How kind! How noble! How generous! Poor little Daisy's gift had come indeed too late, but it had come from a full heart, and the true hearts around bore no grudge.

She looked from one to another; all were regarding her affectionately; several were ministering to her wants. She had disturbed their peace, unsettled their prospects, despised and betrayed them, and now it seemed, however innocently, had snatched away what should have been theirs by right; and they had no thought even of forgiveness! "I wonder if I should ever forget this," Monica said to herself.

At length she had to go. It was the end of April, a warm and lovely day, and the feathery banks of young green on every side yielded forth now and again the wandering cuckoo's note, interspersed with those of other woodland songsters. As Monica drove along by lane and hedge-row, the quietude and peace which had been experienced throughout the day degenerated into a deep sadness,

Rejoicing nature often makes us sadder than mourning nature. It is hard to have neither part nor lot in its innocent gayety. It forces upon our souls a contrast. The bird-songs have no music in our ears, when the heart refuses to sing; the waving tops of the trees fan no cool delights upon the brow which throbs by reason of the burning thoughts within. The sunshine cannot win a smile, when tears have started first.

Yet Monica shed no tears; she did not feel disposed to weep, even thought itself partially suspended: there only remained a dumb heaviness of spirit with which she had no strength to struggle.

"I think I will get out and walk the rest of the way," she concluded suddenly, and desired the coachman to draw rein in a narrow grass path, beset with green, within a mile of Oldfield.

To drive straight back to the Rowlands' would be to have to rouse herself from reminiscences, from sighs and silence—and this she could not endure to do.

There was abundance of time. She had had all the refreshment she needed, and it would surprise nobody that she had chosen to prolong her solitude in the balmy sunshine of a glorious evening.

Almost involuntarily my heroine followed footsteps whithersoever they led her. With listless eyes she marked the wild flowers, blue hyacinths, early primroses, peeping blossoms of one sort and another which nestled by the wayside. It was nearly the last day of the month, it was almost May, in short, and the season having been unusually mild, every tender leaf had uncurled, and every bud had burst through its outer covering.

All along the sylvan lane, which twined its lonely way through banks of red sandstone overhung by tangled shrub and brushwood, there was fresh springing grass beneath the feet; and the little ponds in shady nooks out of sight were blue in reflection of the sky above and thick with budding rushes.

Monica had always loved this lane. There was a seclusion and stillness about it which suited her restless spirit. She had often marked with appreciative eye the gnarled branches of the spreading oaks which were to be seen from every little height and vantage

ground; had often alit from her saddle to gather the red and purple berries of the spreading brambles which had been in full luxuriance what time she and her sister and uncle were traversing the same windings. It had been a favorite haunt of all.

Now, she came alone.

To come alone to spots which are linked with the memory of others is a thought to excite pensiveness, if no other feeling; but on the present occasion Monica Lavenham's heart was heavy from another cause. She looked gently at a certain bank—Bell had once sprung up it; reverently at another point—her uncle had once rested upon it; but she knew for all that, that these were but the bubbles on the surface which the strong, deep current beneath was tossing up!

Pacing along, her eyes were upon the ground.

Then she came to a little bend in the lane, and a jutting ledge of rook, and all at once became aware of a footstep, and a presence between her and the sun.

She looked up and beheld—Dorrien!

. . . . . .

CONCLUSION.

With one wild shriek Monica fell heavily upon the grass.

Was her reason leaving her? Had she become mad from grief? Had remorse unwitted her?

These were her first terrible thoughts as consciousness swiftly returned after some few seconds of a death-like swoon, and she still found herself face to face with the dead, clasped in arms that should have been forever numb.

Oh, to see the vision melt and vanish as all the rest had vanished! To be powerless to stay that fleeting form! To retain those burning whispers!

Moment by moment she lay sighing still. And still the phantasm remained. Could a spirit thus entreat, implore? Could a formless essence impart so close a pressure? Could dead men breathe—she shuddered from head to foot.

At length she unclosed her eyes. Wonder of wonders, he was still there! She struggled to rise; he gently restrained her: she gazed around; he sought to block the view. Broken syllables fell from her lips; he whispered back.

"Monica, Monica," he murmured, "dearest Monica! Don't you know me? Oh, look at me—look at me—I am not so changed but that you can see it is I, who once—oh, when we parted—how little hope had I of this! But—but why are you so startled? Why do you shake so? You knew I had come back, did you not? Yes, you did, you must have heard. What? You had *not* heard? Not heard *anything*? You have received no letter, nor—nor. Oh, no wonder that I terrified you!"

The tears burst from her eyes. "Oh, Heavens!" cried Dorrien. "But still I don't understand," proceeded he. "Your sister wrote last night; wrote while I was there; and sent the letter to Oldfield—What! you have been absent all day from Oldfield. Never mind—never mind "impetuously," it does not matter—nothing matters now. I am *here*—I am *with you*;—"a pause. Monica," in trembling accents, "Monica, they said they did not wish you to be 'surprised'; what did that mean?"

She murmured something too low to be caught. He bent closer. She gently moved to free herself. "Let me," he pleaded, "one half minute, and you shall own I have the right. I have come back as I went only in one respect; I love you now as I loved you then, and as I shall love you always—always. And *now* I can speak—I may speak. I am no longer poor, miserable, tongued-tied; I am rich. Am I," he gazed into her face, "am I to be happy?"

What said Monica?

I doubt if either ever knew.

It would take too long to explain all the circumstances of Dorrien's lost identity in his own words; we will therefore briefly inform our readers of the facts, all of which were, we may be sure, fully discussed and dwelt upon ere the lovers quitted their involuntary trysting-place.

Dorrien had gone out, as we know, to seek a vagrant

relation bearing the same name. Luke Dorrien had, however, dropped that name a few years previously on a certain important occasion, which, as it had considerable effect upon the fortunes of my hero, may be here shortly described.

Luke had made a discovery, and to make a discovery in Australia is to make a fortune.

No one was better aware of this than the vagabond scion of the Dorrien race, and the effect wrought upon him in consequence had been electrical. He had been sobered into sense—also into a measure of slyness. Foreseeing himself a man of means, possibly a man of enormous wealth, he had immediately begun to look upon the Dorriens at home as *his* vagrant relations; upon his uncle as a hand-to-mouth, needy old man; upon his cousin as an idle, good-for-nothing, hanging-on sort of young one. Neither of them, he had vowed, should have a chance of hanging on to *him*. His new money was not for those who had squandered and wasted the old money.

But perhaps from a consciousness of lingering weakness, from a dread that, if applied to, he should be unable to refuse assistance, he had come to the curious resolution of cutting himself altogether adrift from the Dorrien race. Moreover he had, with a wink of one eye to the other, created a new Luke Dorrien, a mining companion, whose name he had taken in exchange.

He had then begun to realize capital as John Smith.

A vague rumor of all this had reached the ears of our old acquaintance, Captain Alverstoke, occasioning his inquiries regarding the Dorrien he knew. If Harry could hit the trail of this vagabond turned millionaire, Harry, he felt, was just the fellow to make all smooth, and who could tell but he, Alverstoke, might see his four thou. again? He had lent the four thou. readily, in what had been perhaps a weak moment; putting it down in his own mind as a bad debt; but he now began to look upon it as a recoverable bad debt.

With this end in view he had, it may be remembered, made what he considered gigantic efforts to communicate with Dorrien, but when no response had been received, the gigantic efforts had ceased; and Captain Alverstoke, who was the most indolent of mankind, had

been sure—(as indolent people invariably are)—that there was nothing further he could do, that all would come right in the end, and that no good ever came of meddlesome interference.

With all this wisdom it had nevertheless never occurred to the sapient Alverstoke that Luke Dorrien having changed his name, his cousin, who was also Luke, though known as Harry, might have done the same.

As a matter of fact, Harry had.

He had cared little about the matter, but as "John Smith" wished it, and as "John Smith" was going to hold out the helping hand in the hour of need, it was the least he could do to yield the point gracefully.

He had hit on "John Smith" by the merest chance at the very first; had run against him within an hour or so of his landing in the country; just as people do invariably run full tilt against their next neighbor at home, directly they are at the other end of the earth.

And Luke Dorrien had had nothing for it but to acknowledge then and there that he was himself and none other. Moreover Luke had no sooner set eyes upon the well-remembered face, than boyish days and merry pranks, a thousand reminiscences of one kind and another, began to crowd in upon his brain. He and Harry had been breeched together. He saw once again the shamefaced little smile Harry gave him on that day.

Had Luke indeed beheld in his cousin the Dorrien whom first we met in these pages, such memories might not have availed to alter later opinions and resolutions; but in the homeless wanderer before him he had seen only a reflex of himself—himself as he had been until within a brief space—and there had been nothing to chill the warm pulsation of his blood. Soon the two had been as brothers.

All good fortune had been equally divided between them, and the rest may be left to the reader's imagination.

Now it happened that at the precise moment when, by Sir Arthur Dorrien's somewhat sudden death, his missing heir was being sought for, the scamp who had picked up Luke Dorrien's cast-off patronymic wound up the career of a criminal by the death of a coward. Advertisements for Sir Harry Luke Dorrien set the tongues of

this fellow's mining companions wagging; and it was generally understood in the confusion of ideas that, although the suicide was not the original Luke Dorrien who had become a rich and respectable personage, he was the Harry Luke Dorrien who had arrived later upon the scene; several were found to swear it was so—oaths are cheap—and the news was transmitted hot to England.

Of course either Dorrien or his cousin could by a word have set matters straight, but, as luck would have it, Harry had started upon the long voyage homewards immediately on hearing of his father's death, and his cousin had been absent in another part of the country. Neither had known anything of the matter.

Dorrien had therefore gone quietly to his club on his arrival in London, little aware of the sensation he would cause there.

But he had dashed off to Queen's Gate presently.

Alverstoke had assured him of Monica's health and beauty, thinking as he did so, "You don't deserve your luck, my lady,"—(a comment which, we may just add, he subsequently took back with the best grace in the world),—and Ernest Rowland—for it was none other than he who had kept hope alive by means of secret and regular communication throughout all this bygone period—had answered for something still dearer to his heart. Monica was free, was unhappy, was—it was not fair to say what she was.

Dorrien left London by the mid-day train. Every calculation made turned out to be correct. The empty carriage returning to Oldfield was his only check, but this had given place to a rebound of delight on hearing not only that he should meet his love directly but that he should meet her alone.

But of course he should never have done as he did, never, never, gazing into her fair face with eyes that devoured every feature, "if—if— oh, he did not know what he was saying! He ought of course to have been more careful, only—only he did not know how. Rowland had told him to be careful, and so had his wife. They had feared—they had hoped—they had dared to be so presumptuous as to fear—or to hope"—in every

stammering, incoherent syllable Monica recognized the Dorrien of old.

He crushed her fingers between his as he spoke.

Why, of course, she had always loved him—always wanted him. His very failings were dearer to her than other men's virtues. The tones of his voice, the language of his eye—had any other speaker ever such looks, such accents? She almost forgave herself. It seemed as if God and men had alike forgiven her.

As she leaned against his shoulder, the large tear now and again welling from her eye, her heaving bosom testifying to past storms and present joy too deep for words, I think Harry Dorrien's own heart throbbed with a new emotion. A few broken syllables dropped from his lips; she almost fancied she caught in them the fragment of a prayer.

Shall we proceed further? No, leave them here, and leave them thus.

By-and-by Dorrien will explain every mystery, will unravel every thread; Monica will learn how he had contrived to retain his own name and personality while communicating with her brother-in-law (it was simple enough, once the tale was told), and Monica in her turn will confide in him the curious turn which Fortune's wheel has also brought to her.

He will feel a passing blush of shame when Daisy Schofield's name arises between them, and he learns the part that Daisy has played in the drama of his love; but he is still, as ever, so deeply absorbed in the one great passion of his life that I fear he has not the attention he should have for other matters.

Monica will lead him with a silken thread.

Well for him that she will. His devotion to his noble wife will be the first step towards higher things, and she who has so lately herself learned, will have a pupil in the lessons of life.

Dorrien's last words as the two rose from the bank, whereon the trees were now casting their lengthened shadows, were these—

"This hour has made amends for all."

THE END.

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